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ABSTRACT

This final report describes strategies identified from interviews with educators in eight school districts in three states (Arkansas, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania) concerning the disproportionate number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services. The first section describes the methodology of the case study examination. Sections 2 and 3 present the three state case studies and the eight school district reports, followed by a section summarizing challenges faced by school districts when addressing disproportionality. The fifth section summarizes recurring themes across states and districts. These include: (1) the importance of having a school staff trained to work with racially/ethnically diverse students; (2) the need for on-going professional development in such areas as positive classroom management, identifying learning strengths, effective instructional practices for diverse learners, and nonbiased assessment; (3) the need for general and special educators to work together; (4) the importance of encouraging parent/family input at all educational levels; (5) the need for special education data to be disaggregated by race/ethnic group; and (6) the importance of school districts monitoring referral and evaluation/assessment processes and exploring ways to address disproportionality. Appended are ratings of state level initiatives, data collection guidelines, and plans from three of the school districts. (DB)

ED 396 473

# Strategies that Address the Disproportionate Number of Students from Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups Receiving Special Education Services: Case Studies of Selected States and School Districts

by Joy Markowitz, Ed.D.

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# Abstract

Over the past several years, Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has conducted a variety of activities on the topic of disproportionate numbers of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services. These activities have included policy forums, a literature review, an analysis of state polices and procedures, and a prioritization of recommendations by a diverse group of stakeholders. Continued inquiries to NASDSE demonstrated that state and local administrators, as well as practitioners, want to know how policymakers and educators around the country address this complex and long-standing concern. In order to meet this critical need, Project FORUM conducted a case study examination of state- and district-level strategies that address disproportionality and the challenges to implementing those strategies. The intent of this report is to stimulate the development of positive proactive strategies to address disproportionality in the context of improved educational outcomes for *all* students.

Interviews with educators in three states and eight school districts revealed the following recurring themes. It is critical to have a school staff that is trained to work with a racially/ethnically diverse student population. On-going professional development is necessary in the areas of positive classroom management, identifying learning strengths, effective instructional practices for diverse learners, non-biased assessment, educational equity, and the richness of racial/ethnic diversity. General and special educators must embrace all students who should be attending the local school and work together to provide a successful learning environment for all those students. Parent/family input should be solicited and incorporated early in the child's school experience and maintained throughout the middle and high school years. Special education data, disaggregated by race/ethnic group, is necessary in order to understand the extent and breadth of disproportionality and focus strategies. School districts have procedures in place to monitor the special education referral and evaluation/assessment process, and are exploring ways to inform the community about efforts to address disproportionality in the context of addressing the learning strengths and challenges of a diverse student population.

# Strategies that Address the Disproportionate Number of Students from Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups Receiving Special Education Services: Case Studies of Selected States and School Districts

## Background and Purpose

In June of 1993, Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) facilitated a national dialogue on the topic of disproportionate numbers of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services[1] by holding a policy forum in Washington, D.C. This was the first in a series of Project FORUM activities addressing a complex topic that has been of concern to educators and civil rights advocates for three decades. This smoldering concern has erupted into legal battles and litigation over the years, and there is a substantial literature on efforts to document disproportionality and ascertain the underlying reasons for its existence. There is also a notable literature on assessment, referral and placement related to this topic (see Harry, 1994, for a comprehensive discussion of this literature.)

Following the 1993 policy forum, Project FORUM commissioned a policy analysis (Lara, 1994) and research synthesis (Harry, 1994) to further examine the issue of disproportionality. These activities led to the prioritization of recommendations by a diverse group of stakeholders and a second policy forum in August 1994 to develop an action plan for the high priority recommendations (Project FORUM, January 1995).

Continued inquiries to NASDSE demonstrated that state and local administrators, as well as practitioners, want to know how policymakers and educators around the country address this complex and volatile issue. In order to meet this critical need, Project FORUM conducted a case study examination of state- and district-level strategies that address the disproportionate number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services and the challenges to implementing those strategies. This case study examination represents a deliberate decision on the part of Project FORUM to stimulate development of positive proactive strategies in the context of improved educational outcomes for all students, rather than continue debate on whether disproportionality exists. It is important to note that this examination was not investigative in nature, nor was it intended to be an identification of *best practices*. This document is a report of those case studies.[2]

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[1] It is important to note that the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) does not require states to collect data on the race/ethnicity of the students identified as disabled and served under IDEA.

[2] In the individual case study reports, a variety of terminology is used to refer to racial/ethnic groups. For example, *White* is used in some reports and *Anglo* used in others. The terminology selected for a given report reflects the common usage in that particular jurisdiction. When asked about the assignment of a racial/ethnic classification to a student,

The first section of this document describes the methodology used during this case study examination. The three state case studies can be found in section two. Section three contains the eight school district reports, followed by a section summarizing the challenges that school districts face when addressing disproportionality. The fifth and final section is a summary of recurring themes across states and districts.

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interviewees indicated that in most cases, classification is selected by the family. However, sometimes a classification may be assigned by office staff or teacher. The issue of how students are classified or what classification should be used for students with parents from different racial/ethnic backgrounds were not raised as concerns in the context of discussion about strategies addressing disproportionality.

Another point related to terminology is the use of the phrase *Corrective Action Plan* (CAP). OCR requires states and districts to write CAPs when they have been cited for a civil rights violation. However, a number of the states and districts that were part of this case study investigation also use this phrase to refer to local or state plans of a corrective nature and are not involved with OCR.

## Methodology

### *Selection of States and Districts*

In the planning phase for the case study examination, directors of all Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) were informed about the study and asked to identify states that had state-level initiatives to address the disproportionate numbers of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services. Prior to the selection of states, Project FORUM held discussions with a number of researchers, policy makers, and state directors of special education regarding appropriate states for the case study examination, and reviewed initiatives related to disproportionality in eleven states. The review of state-level initiatives is described in detail in Appendix A. The goal was to select states, with diverse student populations, in different parts of the country in order to obtain various perspectives on this critical issue. Unfortunately, the familiar constraints of time and money limited the selection of states to three and districts to a maximum of three per state.

The state directors of special education were contacted in the selected states, and details regarding their voluntary participation in the case study examination were explained. The following three states agreed to be part of the study--Arkansas, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. The state directors of special education or their designees identified school districts for site visits based on the following guidelines: diverse student population, past or present disproportionality, location of districts allowed for site visits within a three-day time frame, and willingness to participate.

The local directors of special education in the selected districts were contacted first by their state director or designee, and the Project FORUM interviewer (author) followed-up with details about voluntary participation in the case study examination. The following districts agreed to be part of the study:

Arkansas

Conway Public Schools
Pulaski County Special School District

New Mexico

Bernalillo Public Schools
Bloomfield Public Schools
Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools

Pennsylvania

Abington School District
Kennett Consolidated School District
Susquehanna Township School District

### *Data Collection and Synthesis*

Two data collection methods were used for this case study--document review and semi-structured interview (in-person). A data collection guideline was developed based on previous Project FORUM activities and a review of the literature. This guideline, which can be found in Appendix B, was used to structure the document review and interviews.

The state and local directors of special education or their designees were asked to mail to Project FORUM any documents on the topic of disproportionality, including policy statements, regulations, and technical assistance documents. These documents were reviewed by the author; an interview protocol was customized from the data collection guideline based on that review.

During state visits, the author met with the state director of special education and other key state-level staff identified by the directors as persons who had been involved in initiatives or technical assistance related to the disproportionate number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services (e.g., assistant directors, staff from bilingual office, monitoring specialist). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a customized interview protocol. Local directors of special education were interviewed along with other staff identified by those directors. In some school districts, direct service providers were involved; while in other districts, superintendents participated in the interview process. A total of 28 educators were interviewed during the state and local site visits. (For a list of the interviewees and their titles, see *Acknowledgements* at the front of this document.) Interviews were conducted between April 11, 1995 and July 14, 1995. All interviews were tape recorded.

Interview data were summarized from taped recordings using the data collection guideline as a framework. Information was re-organized as themes emerged. All case study reports were reviewed for accuracy by a state or local representative prior to publication.

## State Case Studies

Arkansas
New Mexico
Pennsylvania

## Arkansas

### *Background and Impetus for Addressing the Issue*

The Arkansas Office of Special Education (hereafter referred to as the SEA) began to have concerns about the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services in the early 1980's. References in the professional literature and the increasing number of court cases related to disproportionality brought attention to this matter. However, there were no state-wide data to substantiate or refute this concern. About this time, Arkansas received documents for dissemination from an institute in Buffalo, New York under contract with the U.S. Department of Education - Office for Civil Rights (OCR). This document contained strategies to reduce the disproportionately high number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups in programs for students who are educable mentally retarded. The SEA disseminated this document to the school districts along with a cover letter expressing concern about disproportionality in Arkansas and encouraging careful examination of the situation in their districts.

Beginning in the 1980's, the SEA included disproportionality on the agenda whenever the local directors of special education were brought together. The SEA's strategy at that time was to bring disproportionality to the attention of the school districts, stress the importance of the issue, and encourage the school districts to be proactive before the SEA was under legal or political pressure to address disproportionality. No school district took on this issue in a comprehensive manner at that time.

The first inquiries regarding disproportionality came once the school desegregation cases in the Little Rock area were in progress. It was at that point that the SEA decided to collect data on the race and gender of all students receiving special education services in Arkansas in order to gain a better understanding of the issue in the state. Without such data, strategies for addressing the issue could not be developed or evaluated for effectiveness.

Beginning with the December 1, 1987 Child Count, school districts were required to submit data by race and gender. However, at this time the SEA did not have specific plans regarding analysis and use of these data. The SEA reviewed the literature, conferred with the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), OCR (as a proactive measure), and talked with other states about their criteria for disproportionality. The literature and inquiries provided little direction and guidance. The SEA ultimately contracted with one of the state universities to analyze the Arkansas data and develop criteria for determining disproportionality.

### *Determination of Disproportionality*

The December 1 Child Count data are now submitted to and analyzed by the SEA every year. The SEA generates computer printouts with special education service data disaggregated by race. These printouts are sent to each school district. If the difference between the percentage of students from a racial/ethnic group in the general student population and the percentage of students receiving special education services who are from that group is greater than 8.3[3], the school district is *red flagged*. For example, if 43 percent of District X's student population is African American, but 59 percent of students receiving special education services are African American, District X is red flagged. This criterion is not applied to school districts that are 95 percent African American or 95 percent White because the numbers are so small that one or two students would skew the data. In these situations, the data would not be a reflection of wide-spread practice.

There has been some discussion about revising the Arkansas criteria; however, the position of the SEA staff is that the criteria themselves are not as important as the process of examination which follows application of the criteria.

### *Community Response*

In 1988, the press obtained the disaggregated special education data under the Freedom of Information Act. These data were published before the SEA had a chance to mail the data to the school districts, although the SEA did review the article for accuracy. The newspaper article suggested that some districts had discriminatory placement practices. This incident did not set the stage for good communication between the SEA and the school districts on the topic of disproportionality.

In the early years, the superintendents' reactions to their data were often defensive, and many requested legal rationale for the SEA's attention to this issue. It was very important to explain how the criteria were established and that it was done considering Arkansas factors. According to the state director of special education, direct adoption of criteria from another state would not have been well received. Now the school districts are less reactive, and there is an understanding that the SEA is available to assist the school districts with issues that could cause substantial problems. In addition, the press rarely requests these data.

Initially the SEA was not as selective about the language used when informing the school districts about disproportionality. It is now clear to the SEA staff that taking a "hard line" or making a definitive statement that the school district "has a problem," is likely to result in less willingness to use the data as a basis for change. The SEA receives fewer negative phone calls when these data are mailed than they did five years ago. One reason is that the school districts now expect these data every year. However, some districts still react defensively when data indicating disproportionality is sent. Other districts take the position that disproportionality is a long-standing fact of life and there is no reason to tackle the issue now. In these situations, the

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[3] Based on the first set of Arkansas data, 8.3 was statistically determined to be a meaningful difference.

SEA emphasizes the potential volatile nature of this issue and the need to be prepared to address accusations of discrimination. However, this strategy does not convince all those who are reluctant. One district has actually refused to do a plan, and the SEA does not have any fiscal or mechanism in place to force the districts to address disproportionality.

Three Arkansas school districts are under court-ordered desegregation, and they use the special education data to answer questions from the courts or to justify their actions to the courts. Some of the school districts not involved in litigation believe that attention to the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services is the result of litigation. In general, there is considerable animosity about the amount of money spent for court-ordered remedies in these districts and resultant attention to related issues such as disproportionality.

Other than the districts under court-ordered desegregation, and the districts cited in a December 1993 US News and World Report article, entitled *Separate But Equal*, the local school boards have taken the stance that disproportionality is an issue the administrative staff should address and no board action is necessary.

The SEA reports that little or no concern about disproportionality has been expressed by parents of students in general education or parents of children receiving special education services. However, individual parents have challenged their districts about special education placement and assessment matters, especially in the greater Little Rock area.

The Arkansas SEA is keenly aware of the research that points to a disproportionately high number of poor children and children born to teenage mothers who need educational support. There are various state-level initiatives to address this problem, including training educators to provide support for these children without classifying them as disabled. However, other agencies must be involved to address needs outside of the educational arena.

### *Strategies That Address Disproportionality*

The school districts that exceed that 8.3 criterion level are informed by mail that their data suggest a potential problem, and there is cause to examine their procedures and strengthen their existing programs to address this issue. The SEA is cautious not to accuse the districts of discriminatory practices. These red-flagged districts are required by the SEA to develop and submit a corrective action plan (CAP) for addressing disproportionality, including, but not limited to, review of the pre-referral, referral, and placement procedures. The SEA offers the school districts tools for self-evaluation and presents this as an opportunity for them to improve their programs. The SEA aims to foster a sense of ownership on the part of the school districts.

The red-flagged districts are given the Needs Assessment Worksheet (NAW). The NAW has 16 multi-part questions addressing *Alternative Educational Practices*, 16 multi-part questions addressing *Referral Practices*, 14 questions addressing the *Evaluation Report*, and 10 multi-part questions addressing *Placement and Programming*. Work sheets are supplied to school districts for examination of their buildings, and they are asked to examine a sample of records to review the following:

- retention of students
- behavior problems/discipline
- multidisciplinary team composition
- type and quality of evaluation instruments
- adaptive behavior
- IQ scores and other standardized data
- parental involvement in staffing
- restrictiveness of placement
- length of time in placement
- timeliness of triennial evaluation
- annual review process

From the NAW, the school district develops a three-year CAP, and submits evidence to the SEA each year of activities outlined in the plan. The district may revise activities and/or timelines if necessary, and submit changes and rationale to the SEA. If a school district's data changes significantly in either direction in one year's time or there is increasing disproportionality over time, the SEA will investigate. In small districts, change may be the result of one large family moving in or out of the area or there may have been an influx of students from "high risk" backgrounds. If the school district's data continues to suggest disproportionality, but positive change has occurred, the SEA commends the district in writing. The school district may request removal from the red-flag list if their data and needs assessment indicate progress in addressing disproportionality. A school district whose current data do not suggest a potential problem, but who has a CAP in effect, is expected to complete the three year plan; however, the SEA does not monitor them as closely.

Initially, school districts were asked to submit a plan each year their data indicated disproportionality. In 1992 an internal committee was established to review the SEA procedures related to disproportionality. This committee decided that submission of a yearly plan created an unnecessary burden on the districts and significant change was unlikely to occur by the time of the next December 1 Child Count. Local directors of special education indicated that the plan must be given time to show change. Thus, the three-year plan requirement was adopted.

Two additional state initiatives are addressing disproportionality indirectly. One was mandated by Act 338, passed by the Arkansas legislature in 1991. Passage of this act was fueled by concern about the high number of students receiving special education services. The act requires general education teachers to identify students with learning problems and address these problems in the classroom. The Arkansas Department of Education was charged with developing a manual which outlines identification and service guidelines. Organized by the SEA, a committee made up of state, district, and school-level educators put together a manual. This manual consists of sound pedagogical practices for helping students in the classroom who are having learning problems, and outlines classroom modifications, pre-referral interventions, and coping strategies for the general education teacher. This committee also developed an in-service training module based on the manual. The manual was distributed to every school building in the state of Arkansas, and in-service training was made available through the SEA. These training sessions and other training directly related to disproportionality were going on simultaneously and complemented each other. (See section below.)

The other state initiative indirectly addressing disproportionality came about as a result of the 1981 federal monitoring. At that time, the Arkansas SEA was required to set up an interagency agreement with the Department of Human Services, which went into effect in 1983. Consequently, there is a strong commitment on the part of the Departments of Health, Education, and Human Services to re-design the manner in which they interact in order that local agencies can better serve children and families, including pooling funds across agencies. The biggest effort has been on preventive initiatives, such as preschool and health programs. A child cannot be educated without regard for his/her family situation. This initiative helps insure that special education services are not provided in lieu of other more appropriate services.

### *Training and Technical Assistance Related to Disproportionality*

When disaggregated special education data were first collected statewide, it was critical to conduct training on such basic topics as *what is disproportionality* and *why is it a problem*. In the late 1980's, the SEA brought in national experts to conduct state-wide and regional training on non-biased assessment and use of data for short- and long-range planning. Over time, topics related to disproportionality have been included in all regularly-scheduled statewide and regional meetings. Currently, the SEA offers technical assistance and training on identifying needs and developing CAPs. This includes:

- rules, regulations and laws which support efforts to address disproportionality
- relevant case law, including landmark cases
- best practices in meeting the needs of students with diverse educational needs
- prereferral strategies
- referral and evaluation procedures
- determination of appropriate special education services

An increasing number of students who have limited English proficiency are enrolling in the public schools, particularly in the Little Rock area. In the past two years the SEA has done training on appropriate assessment procedures for this population, and has stressed that limited English proficiency is not a reason in and of itself for providing special education services.

The SEA invites red-flagged districts to participate in training once every three-year cycle. Training sessions are held in ten regions of the state and are scheduled to coincide with the regularly-scheduled quarterly meetings between SEA regional supervisors and school districts. The SEA tries to connect school districts that have similar characteristics and issues to address in regard to disproportionality in order to facilitate peer support. Any district is welcome to attend training sessions on this topic regardless of what their data indicates. The SEA takes the position that special education mirrors the general education program; therefore, when disproportionality is a potential problem, examination of the total educational program is encouraged.

Most of the 312 districts in Arkansas have had some training or technical assistance on disproportionality. Large group meetings, either statewide or regional, are now less frequent and have been largely replaced by technical assistance to individual districts on CAP development and improving the total educational program. The SEA staff try to respond to the specific needs of the district. They have done training with school administrators and superintendents, and sometimes even board members. The training may be one-on-one. In recent years, the SEA has received requests, some directly from superintendents, to critique the strategies in place in a particular district or specific school building. This allows the SEA to offer support at the level where implementation must take place. Once the building administrator understands the critical issues, implementation of the CAP is more successful. It is not as effective to train teachers if the principal is not present and espousing the plan's value. If the principal has had experience with the provision of special education services, the CAP is even more likely to be implemented successfully.

Over the past decade, about 10-15 percent of the school districts have initiated contact with the SEA on disproportionality. And, according to the SEA staff, training and technical assistance from the SEA is more successful if it is initiated by the district. The school districts have initiated contact for a number of reasons. Some have decided to take proactive steps towards addressing disproportionality and have heard through their informal network that the SEA will work with them. In several cases, school districts have sought assistance from the SEA because disproportionality became an issue of concern in a neighboring district. For example, when the 1993 US News and World Report article, *Separate But Equal*, was published, two districts in Arkansas were cited. This generated phone calls for technical assistance from the surrounding districts.

As the SEA staff does its routine monitoring, they follow-up on the CAPs. This has been an effective way to keep track of what is going on around the state in regard to disproportionality, and districts come to expect this as a part of the state monitoring process. In the process of addressing disproportionality, school districts have become aware of broader educational problems and have used this as a springboard for educational reform. This has made the CAP a more positive exercise.

## *Challenges and Areas of Greatest Need*

The biggest problem identified by the SEA is that too often good CAPs are written, but there is limited implementation. In some cases, a handful of school district staff write the plan, but no one at the school level is aware of its existence. It is easier to find people to write a good plan to address disproportionality than it is to implement strategies to correct it. This is not due to a lack of commitment or knowledge, but is the result of no clear delegation of responsibility for implementation. Communication related to the plan is often a problem, or the plan may get lost in the shuffle because it is not a priority.

It is important to build trust with local administrators in order to implement changes that will address disproportionality. But this is a challenge because new personnel, particularly superintendents, may have different reactions to the disproportionate data and set different priorities for the school district. Therefore, the good intentions of veteran administrators may be diverted by a new agenda.

Making fundamental change at any level is a challenge. Veteran teachers may be reluctant to change their teaching techniques even if they are told that different techniques will be more appropriate for an increasingly diverse student population. Strong leadership from the school principal has been identified as a critical force in implementing changes that will address disproportionality.

In many cases, disproportionality is reflective of the fact that there are few, if any, support services for students other than special education. The SEA has found that most referrals to special education are due to behavior or reading problems. The SEA is working with those districts to develop appropriate educational support without classifying students as disabled.

When school districts are assessing their areas of need, the area most often identified is prereferral strategies. This is a big concern because most students who are referred for special education services are classified as disabled and receive services. Another area of need is personnel who are trained to assess students with limited English proficiency.

In some school districts, the overall number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services is no longer disproportionately high; however, a higher percentage of these students are being served in self-contained classrooms. A new state special education funding formula has been introduced to the legislature which will eliminate the financial incentive to put students in restrictive settings.

## New Mexico

### *Background and Impetus for Addressing the Issue*

New Mexico has a long history of statutes, constitutional provisions and state policies related to bilingual and multicultural education, beginning with the 1912 constitutional provision that maintains a bilingual citizenry. The most recent highlights are as follows:

1968 - The New Mexico State Board of Education was the first state board to issue a policy on bilingual education.

1975 - State Board Regulation 75-19 included guidelines for implementing bilingual/multicultural programs, specifically requirements to teach language arts daily in the home language of the students.

- The New Mexico State Department of Education was the first state department of education to endorse teaching English as a second language.

1978 - The New Mexico State Department of Education was the first in the nation to endorse bilingual education.

1986 - Navajo language endorsement was added for teacher licensure.

1990 - Pueblo language endorsement was added for teacher licensure

1992 - A State Board of Education initiative endorsed competency in two languages, one of which is English.

- New Mexico issued a document outlining the Federal regulations for special education and related services as they apply to language and culture.

This history points to a policy framework on which to build initiatives to address the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education. Disproportionality has been discussed in the public policy arena in New Mexico since the late 1960s and early 70s, generated by civil rights concerns. The issue of disproportionality is complex in New Mexico because not only are there race and ethnicity factors, but language and culture are significant as well. For example, there are many Native American populations (pueblos) in New Mexico and each pueblo has a unique position regarding education outside the reservation. In addition, some of the Native American languages are not written and/or not spoken off the reservation.

In recent months, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has been conducting complaint investigations in a number of New Mexico school districts. However, the initial concern about disproportionality grew out of a university study in the early 1980's which suggested that students from minority racial/ethnic groups were disproportionately represented in some disability classifications. Also, about this time, observation of gifted classes indicated that the diversity of New Mexico's student population was not reflected in programs for the gifted. (Gifted education falls under the jurisdiction of special education in New Mexico.) Based on this information, the New Mexico Department of Special Education (hereafter referred to as the SEA) concluded that statewide data were needed to determine the extent and breadth of disproportionality. Also, baseline data were needed in order to conduct future evaluation of strategies addressing disproportionality.

The SEA began collecting the race and gender of students receiving special education services in New Mexico's 89 school districts in 1988. However, it was not until 1990, when data were disaggregated by race and gender, that disproportionality could be determined.

The disaggregated data on students enrolled in gifted programs documented a disproportionately high number of White students in those programs. As a result, there was closer scrutiny of selection procedures, and the state statute was changed. In addition, these data strengthened the commitment to collect race and gender information and to disaggregate data for all special education services.

It is interesting to note that it was not until 1985 that New Mexico applied for Federal funds under the Education of the Handicapped Act, enacted in 1975, making it the last state to do so. Up until that time, only state regulations governed the provision of special education services.

### *Determination of Disproportionality*

The establishment of criteria for determining disproportionality generated much discussion at the SEA. One concern was how disproportionality would be determined in the small school districts that had very few students in the low incidence disability classifications. There was also great concern about how the data would be used. Persons with expertise in statistics within the State Department of Education were consulted in order to develop criteria that took into consideration the concerns of all the school districts.

The SEA merges two databases to compile disaggregated special education statistics--40th day Child Count data and gender/race breakdowns by disability from the December 1 data. Data are examined on all students receiving special education services in the 89 school districts in the following categories; however, the first seven categories are scrutinized more closely:

- 3 year old developmentally delayed programs
- 4 year old developmentally delayed programs

- intellectually disabled (formally mentally retarded)
- speech/language impaired
- seriously emotionally/behaviorally disturbed
- specific learning disabled
- gifted
- hard of hearing
- deaf
- visually impaired
- orthopedically impaired
- other health impaired
- deaf blind
- multi-disabled
- autistic
- traumatic brain injured

For each racial/ethnic group, the percentage of the students in each disability category is compared to the percentage of students belonging to that racial/ethnic group in the school district. If the percentage of students with disabilities in a given racial/ethnic category is five percent above or below the percentage of that racial/ethnic group in the district, it is considered to be disproportional. For example, if 20 percent of a district's student population is Hispanic and 25 percent of the students classified as Intellectually Impaired are Hispanic, this would be considered a disproportionately high number of Hispanic students in this disability classification.

An *Equity Index* is also calculated for each racial/ethnic group and disability category. This index is calculated by dividing the percentage of students with disabilities in a given racial/ethnic group by the percentage of all students in that racial/ethnic group. For the example in the paragraph above: 25 / 20 = 1.25. A quotient of 1.5 or greater indicates significant disproportionality. The Equity Index provides an additional perspective on the data and helps determine if the disproportionality is significant. Although disaggregated data collection began in 1988, the Equity Index was not added until 1991. The SEA began sending disaggregated data printouts, with the Equity Index calculated, to all school districts in the spring of 1994.

### *Community Response*

At the time the school districts were asked to collect special education data by race and gender, a new special education student database system was introduced to make data collection easier. Student-related data had been collected twice a year for State purposes and once a year for Federal purposes. Legislative action consolidated these three data collection activities into one. The new special education student database was well received by the school districts because it facilitated responding to questions from legislators on this topic.

When the SEA sends data reports to the school districts, the intent is not to charge the district with discriminatory practices or enforce specific procedures. Written notification states that disproportionate numbers may be a fact, but may not signify a "problem." The SEA is

interested in the district's explanation of the data. According to SEA staff, there are rarely strong negative reactions to the data reports.

Disproportionality has not been expressed as a concern by parents. SEA staff speculated that in regard to Hispanic parents, this may be an artifact of the culture, which discourages parents from confronting or even discussing such issues with educators. Also, as recently as the last generation, parents of Native American students were not involved in their child's education at all because youth were taken from the reservations by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and put into residential schools. Therefore, tradition does not encourage Native American parent involvement. When parents from minority racial/ethnic groups express concerns to SEA staff, they are typically related to accessing services parents deem necessary for their children.

### *Strategies That Address Disproportionality*

The SEA takes the position that school district staff genuinely want to educate students in the most effective way possible. If teachers are frustrated in their attempts to meet a student's needs, they are going to look for assistance from wherever it is available. Historically, the only support available was special education services. When school districts are sent data reports, the intention is to stimulate discussion and self-examination within the district. If data indicate potential disproportionality, the letter from the State Director of Special Education *recommends* that the school district examine referral, assessment and placement procedures during long-range planning. The hope is that the school district and the general community will work together to find explanations for their data and, if necessary, develop strategies to address disproportionality.

In the early 1990's a number of statewide task forces were set up to examine the congruence between the State and Federal regulations related to disproportionality, and to determine areas of need for technical assistance from the SEA. The SEA is now trying to identify a few focused initiatives. The SEA staff believe there is a danger in trying to focus attention on too many initiatives without prioritizing.

When the SEA carries out site visits for school district accreditation, the data reports are used as a basis for discussion. If data indicate potential disproportionality, SEA staff talk with administrators about the availability of pre-referral interventions, and racial/ethnic sensitivity at the time of referral and assessment.

In response to numerous requests for technical assistance related to students who are linguistically and/or culturally diverse (SLCD) and disabled, a statewide task force was established to develop a document. The development of this document was originally conceived of as a regional activity, to be done in the southern part of the state. However, because of the significance of the issue, a SEA staff member was assigned to this task force and was actively involved. The task force also included university staff and national experts in specific topic areas. The document was intended to address expressed and observed needs and to provide technical assistance without the power of a regulation.

The resulting document, entitled *A Technical Assistance Document Addressing the Provision of Educational Services for Students who are Linguistically and Culturally Diverse and the Identification of Students in Need of Special Education and Related Services (February 1995)*, was approved by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. The contents are as follows:

- Definitions, Protections, Federal Regulations, State Statutes, and Court Rulings Regarding Equal Education Opportunity
- When a Student Shows Need of Interventions
- Family/School/Community Involvement
- Assessment/Referral/Use of Interpreters
- Service Delivery

This document was disseminated to the school districts in the spring of 1995. During the 1995-96 school year, specific training sessions will be available. One important issue emphasized in regard to pre-referral interventions and special education services for SLCD is the distinction between language proficiency and dominance. Dominance in English does not mean that the student is proficient in that language, and the use of English standardized tests to determine the need for special education services may result in a disproportionately high number of SLCD receiving such services. Therefore, one of the most important facts to obtain about a student having difficulty in school is the student's linguistic background.

Another technical assistance document available from the SEA is the *Bilingual Multicultural Education Guidelines for Compliance with Existing Federal & State Law* (1994-95). This document focuses on services for students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). It includes the following:

- Federal laws, Court decisions, and OCR Policy Memoranda Concerning LEP Students
- Needs Assessment Procedures and Criteria
- Program Design and Implementation
- Staffing Requirements
- Parent Notification and Involvement
- Program Evaluation
- Exit Criteria for LEP Students
- Financial Support and Program Approval

The SEA also has a document which defines terms as they apply to language and culture--*Standards for Excellence for New Mexico Compliance Manual for Special Education and Related Services*. Particularly relevant are the definitions of *native language*, *evaluation procedures*, *delivery of services procedures*, *criteria for determining the existence of a specific learning disability*, and *children who are gifted*.

Also available from the SEA is a self-assessment tool for school districts--the *District Self-Appraisal Checklist*. This was sent to all LEAs and school principals in November 1994. A section of this checklist specifically addresses the special education evaluation and placement of LEP students. An appendix to that checklist outlines the areas of concern in regard to evaluation and placement of LEP students with disabilities.

To date, the school districts have not requested much technical assistance directly related to disproportionality, with the exception of clarification about the Equity Index and information about appropriate assessment procedures and instruments. However, those school districts under OCR investigation have contacted the SEA for information on how to address issues cited by OCR.

### *Challenges and Areas of Greatest Need*

SEA representatives expressed the need for more involvement of community leaders so that parents from minority racial/ethnic groups receive adequate information about educational disabilities and available educational support. For example, Hispanic and Native American families are often timid about seeking help. This is exemplified in the Other Health Impaired disability classification, which is used for students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and the Autistic classification. The number of Hispanic and Native American students are disproportionately low in these classifications.

School-level data, disaggregated by race/ethnic group, need to be readily available for use in program improvement because the school building is where most educational decisions are made for individual students. More coordination between general and special education is needed to strengthen the school-based Student Assistance Teams (SAT). There is the expectation that schools have such teams, but the SEA is not actively involved with this effort. In addition, the SEA staff stated that there is a need to improve interagency collaboration related to the provision of services to students and their families.

There is a small number of special education staff at the SEA, and it is a challenge to meet all the requests for information from the school districts, Federal government, and other sources. For example, the districts do not have appropriate assessment tools and procedures to evaluate the educational needs of the diverse student population in New Mexico. The SEA is considering the use of distance learning (via satellite) for technical assistance, which would reach many more district-level staff without incurring the expenses related to staff travel.

## Pennsylvania

### *Background and Impetus for Addressing the Issue*

In the early 1980's, in the process of reviewing a wide range of school data for desegregation efforts, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Office of School Equity became aware that there was a disproportionately high number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services. This was brought to the attention of the Bureau of Special Education, which was already aware of these data. Bureau staff talked with other state education agencies and the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and learned that disproportionality was also a problem in many other states. It was also in the early 1980's that Pennsylvania's Office of Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language and its Bureau of Special Education began to examine how to meet the educational needs of students with limited English proficiency. The concern was that some of these children were receiving special education services when they actually needed English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

When Pennsylvania's Special Education Regulations and Standards were revised in 1990, concerns about disproportionality and appropriate educational services for students from racial/ethnic minority groups spurred the inclusion of a requirement that all school districts with disproportionate data must be notified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (hereafter referred to as the SEA). However, no action was required on the part of the school district. Statewide data on special education enrollment, disaggregated by racial/ethnic group, became available beginning in the 1990-91 school year. These data indicated disproportionality in many school districts and triggered more aggressive action.

Also in the early 1990's, there were two desegregation court cases in Pennsylvania which involved students receiving special education services, and Federal monitoring resulted in notification of procedural violations within special education. The procedural violations centered around the provision of special education services without notice or informed consent. These events were further impetus to examine special education enrollment data and take action.

On June 7, 1993, the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 16-Section 112 which stipulates that the SEA shall review the 1991-92 student data and identify school districts where the gender and ethnic representation in special education services exceeds five percent (5%) of that group's representation in the total student population. The SEA was also held responsible for reporting to the Committees on Education in the Senate and the House of Representatives by October 1993 the findings of the review, an outline for further investigative steps, recommendations for actions, and technical assistance to be provided by the SEA to the school districts.

The Pennsylvania initiatives related to disproportionality focus on African American and Hispanic-American students with the primary disabilities of Severe Learning Disability, Mental

Retardation, Serious Emotional Disturbance, and gifted. These areas were selected because data were most disproportionate for these racial/ethnic groups, and it is these disability classifications that involve the most professional subjectivity at the time of diagnosis. Disproportionality does not appear to exist in those classifications resulting from a medical condition (e.g., deaf, blind).

### *Determination of Disproportionality*

When special education data were first examined, a 2.5 percent difference criterion was used, meaning that if the percentage of students with disabilities in a given racial/ethnic minority group was 2.5 percent above or below the percentage of that racial/ethnic group in the school district, the data were considered to be disproportional. For example, if 20 percent of a school district's student population was African American and 22.5 percent of the students with disabilities were African American, this was considered a disproportionately high number of African American students classified as being disabled. This criterion identified about 200 out of the 501 school districts as having disproportionality concerns. The high number of districts identified, along with the fact that many of those districts had relatively few students from racial/ethnic minority groups, caused the SEA to change the percent difference criterion from 2.5 to 5.0.

Pennsylvania also uses an algebraic derivation of the "z-test of statistical significance of a proportion" to determine if the difference in the percentages is statistically significant. Z-scores with absolute values greater than or equal to 1.65 are considered to be statistically significant, meaning there is at least a 90 percent certainty that the difference is not due to chance. This statistical test compares the percentage of African American and Hispanic students in the school district to the percentage of African American and Hispanic students in each disability classification. This test of significance does not establish that discrimination is the cause of the disproportionate data. The intent is for the school districts to use the data as a springboard for reviewing policies and procedures.

Students in the following categories are not included when enrollment data are analyzed: preschool, wards of the state, those enrolled in juvenile correctional facilities, those enrolled in approved private schools, or those enrolled in the Scranton State School of the Deaf.

The report for the Senate and House Education Committees required in Act 16 Section 112 was submitted in October 1993. This report, entitled *Report of Racial and Ethnic Grouping*, was prepared by the Bureau of Special Education, in collaboration with the Office of School Equity, the Office of Bilingual/English as a Second Language Education, the Division of Migrant Education, and professionals from several school districts. Special education enrollment data were analyzed and disaggregated by racial/ethnic group in the 21 out of 501 school districts that had a minority student population five percent or greater.[4] Data from all of these 21 districts

indicated disproportionality using the 5.0 percent difference criterion. The *Report of Racial and Ethnic Grouping* included the following information:

- name of school district
- total public school enrollment
- total African American and Hispanic enrollment
- percentage of African American and Hispanic students in the total student population
- total number of students in special education (not including gifted)
- total number of African American and Hispanic students in special education
- percentage of students in special education who are African American and Hispanic

### *Community Response*

By the early 1990's there was a coalition of minority parents that questioned why their children were receiving special education services and when their children would return to the general education program. However, there was not any expressed concern about disproportionality from minority parents when the *Report of Racial and Ethnic Grouping* was issued. SEA staff said that parents are eager for appropriate education for their children, and if special education services hold out the promise for something better, they want these services for their children.

### *Strategies That Address Disproportionality*

Historically, when a student in Pennsylvania began to have difficulty in the classroom, referral to special education was almost automatic because there was funding and a commitment to address individual student needs. If a student was referred by the classroom teacher for evaluation, more often than not, the student was classified as disabled and special education services were initiated. Therefore, according to SEA staff, all proactive strategies to address disproportionality must start in the general education classroom.

The current Special Education Regulations and Standards of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, require that school districts with disproportionate numbers of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services submit a Corrective Action Plans (CAP) to the SEA. The CAP must address the following areas:

- General Education

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[4] Eighty-five percent (85%) of the African American students in Pennsylvania attend school in 29 of the 501 school districts.

  - Relevance of curriculum for students from ethnic minority groups
  - Experiential background, language proficiency, cultural characteristics, socioeconomic status, modes of communication, self-concept, and motivation of students
  - Evaluation of instruction
    (e.g., standards, on-going data collection, staff development)
  - Teacher qualifications, experience, style, expectation, perceptions, instructional management, and behavior management
  - Motivation of students, sequence of instruction, language of instruction, and coordination with other programs
  - Involvement of minority parents and community

- Pre-referral

  - Consideration of language and culture
  - Support services and modifications available to meet student needs
  - Pro-active identification procedures for minority gifted students
  - Review of student's language skills
    (e.g., language use at home, with peers, and previous language of instruction)

- Multidisciplinary evaluation/assessment

  - Procedures used for minority students
  - Involvement of ESL/Bilingual staff, minority parents, staff sensitive to student's culture and/or language
  - Determination that the problem is not related to native language or culture
  - Use of tests/evaluation materials in the native language or preferred mode of communication of the student

- Individualized Education Program

  - Attention to language and cultural needs
  - Exit criteria procedures appropriate for minority students
  - Support services sensitive to culture and language
  - Involvement of parents and culturally sensitive staff
  - Inclusion opportunities
  - Range of options
  - Communication with parents in language of parents and free of jargon
  - Availability of interpreters when necessary

- Re-evaluation

  - Data-driven procedures that look at exit criteria
  - Percentage of minority students that exit

- Placement

  - Inclusion of minority students in general education settings and home schools
  - Percentage of minority students who move to more restrictive settings

- Personnel Information

  - Number of administrators, teachers, teacher aides, other staff who are African American, Hispanic, and bilingual/bicultural

As of February 1995, the CAP Review Committee was composed of the Chief of the Division of Technical Assistance-Bureau of Special Education, the Bilingual Education Advisor-Division of Communications and Math, the Director of the School Equity Office, and the Consultant for Cultural and Linguistic Diversity to the Instructional Support Team. This committee critiques the CAPs and makes suggestions for improvement. When the SEA conducts its regular monitoring visits during the school year, questions are directed at the CAP and the most recent disaggregated data are reviewed. However, there is currently no systematic monitoring of CAP implementation.

Through a CSPD (Comprehensive System for Personnel Development) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, there are 19 partnerships between school districts and universities. The purpose of these partnerships is to enhance the pre- and in-service training of educators. The SEA has begun to work with about 20 colleges and universities to insure that they are aware of teacher training needs related to working with diverse student populations.

### *Training and Technical Assistance Related to Disproportionality*

The October 1993 document outlines technical assistance (TA) to be offered by the SEA to school districts that are required to develop CAPs. The SEA is in the process of developing a TA plan. The SEA will obtain input from school districts and a variety of stakeholders during the planning stage. TA will focus on development of CAPs, pre-referral strategies, appropriate student assessment procedures, and effective instructional methods and cognitive approaches to learning. For school districts with disproportionate data, participation in training will be mandatory.

Data are now available to identify school districts with a disproportionality; however, the goal is to disaggregate these data by schools so that training efforts can be customized at the building level. As training plans are developed, there will be a focus on supporting general education teachers in order that they feel competent to serve a diverse group of students in the general classroom. With the move towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom, teachers are looking for a broader range of instructional methods.

The SEA, through the Office of School Equity, currently offers multicultural training to schools that are willing to commit to once a month over a six to nine month period. They have found that one time, half-day workshops are not an effective way to change attitudes and increase cultural/ethnic awareness. The director of the School Equity Office speculates that teachers may not be ready to benefit from multicultural training until they have been teaching for a number of years and have experienced the growing diversity of our student population. Therefore, this type of training is best at the in-service level.

The training focuses on broadening and expanding instructional strategies, using different ethnic/cultural perspectives. The goal is better teaching, which ultimately benefits ALL students. This training de-emphasizes the five "Fs"--food, festivals, films, fashion shows, and facts. The plan is to infuse multicultural training into the training focusing on disproportionality.

A related TA effort is focusing on development of Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) in the schools. Chapter 14 of the 1990 Special Education Regulations and Chapter 342 of the Special Education Standards (1990) required school districts to institute the IST process by 1995 in schools that house grades K-6. The IST process is used to identify effective instructional approaches for students prior to referral for special education services, as well as to help support students with disabilities in the general classroom.

The IST process is based on the premise that teachers need assistance in meeting the increasingly complex academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of their students. One of the goals of the IST process is to help teachers recognize that they are not solely responsible for resolving student difficulties; the entire school has a role in each student's success. Keeping students successful in general education is a cornerstone of the IST process. Staff resources are used in new and creative ways when schools embrace the notion that supporting a student in a general class setting is the first and preferred option. The IST serves as a bridge between special and general education.

IST Training began in 1990. During the first year of a school district's participation in the IST program, training is provided by the SEA. One component of the training is a multi-day workshop/seminar for elementary principals the summer before the school implements the IST process. Over 1,000 principals have participated thus far. After the first year, school districts receive on-going training and support through their local intermediate unit. Peer support is available from principals who have already been in the program. State-level financial support for ISTs reached $11 million during the 1994-95 school year. Funds are used by school districts to initiate the program and to offset the cost of the support teachers in the schools.

Components of Training:

- Collaboration and team building - working together to address issues related to student learning and behavior (the central element of an effective IST process).

- Instructional assessment - analyzing the student's response to instructional strategies in a systematic and naturalistic (in classroom, under everyday conditions) manner.

- Instructional adaptation - adapting materials and performance evaluation to provide students with different ways to learn the required content and demonstrate mastery.

- Effective interaction patterns/Student discipline/Behavior management - assisting the student perform the required task/behavior rather than punishing him/her for failure to comply.

- Student assistance for *at-risk* issues - building students' personal coping skills (e.g., self-concept, identification and communication of feelings, social interaction, and decision making), which prevent discipline problems from developing.

Intense training from the SEA-based IST Project has been provided to a limited number of school districts. This training involves working in selected schools on specific procedures for meeting the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population though the IST process. Training is provided to teaching staff, and may or may not involve the principal. According to the IST Project, this intense training with staff that work directly with students appears to be much more effective than one-shot workshops.

As of the 1994-95 school year, all 501 school districts have implemented the IST program in at least one school, totalling nearly 1400 schools. All 1969 elementary schools and 489 middle schools are expected to have an IST in place by the 1997-98 school year. ISTs are permissible at the secondary level, but not required.

According to the SEA staff, preliminary data suggest that the longer a school has been involved in the IST program, the more frequently the teachers use the process as an alternative to special education referral. Teachers in non-IST schools refer approximately three percent of their students for a multidisciplinary special education evaluation, while teachers in IST schools refer two percent or less. Also, compared to years prior to IST, schools are seeing as much as a 67 percent decrease in the use of retention. In the future, when TA to school districts with CAPs begins, IST training will automatically be provided to schools in the district that have not had such training.

### *Challenges and Areas of Greatest Need*

In general, the school districts have not embraced the issue of disproportionality nor actively sought ways to redress this problem. The SEA staff believe that disproportionality is part of the larger issue of *educational equity*. Districts and individual schools must be dedicated to the delivery of a challenging educational program to a multiracial/multiethnic student population. However, this is not happening on a large scale across the state. For example, there is some preliminary data which suggest that students from racial/ethnic minority groups are more likely than White students to be referred directly for special education evaluation, without having gone through the IST process.

There are still many educators who believe that education in a small classroom with individualized attention cannot be bad for *any* student, particularly if the student is struggling in the general classroom. Therefore, addressing disproportionality is not perceived to be a priority. In some school districts, a disproportionately high number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups have been in special education classes for two decades, and there is no local incentive to change this pattern. In these cases, the CAP becomes a perfunctory gesture because the school districts are not being held accountable. At the present time, compliance with the requirement to develop and implement a CAP is not tied to funding in any way, and the SEA has no means by which to enforce this requirement.

Although school districts supply data to the SEA for analysis, most districts do not disaggregate data by school for use in evaluating and modifying their educational programs. These data could be used to help schools meet the challenge of improved outcomes for *all* students. The SEA staff believe that schools and teachers should be rewarded for succeeding with students in the general education program and not be given additional funds (incentives) for taking students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds out of general programs.

SEA staff believe there is not enough *appropriate* training being provided at the pre-service and in-service levels to prepare educators for an increasingly-diverse student population, particularly in the area of instructional methods and assessment in the disability classifications that involve the most professional subjectivity at the time of diagnosis (e.g., serious emotional disturbance, and mental retardation). Therefore, educators are falling back on traditional methods of teaching and evaluating that are no longer appropriate.

In addition, according to the Chief of the Division of Technical Assistance, some school districts do not have the human resources and experience necessary to write an effective CAP. They need training in the area of evaluating and changing their policies and procedures. Other districts have very good CAPs; however, they fall short in the implementation phase. It is necessary to determine the reasons for limited implementation (e.g., staff resources to implement the plan, expertise in key areas inadequate, lack of commitment) and try to address this problem. The SEA, itself, has limited staff and has difficulty meeting the training and TA needs of the school districts. Unfortunately, even when there is adequate training available, there remains a certain percentage of staff who are resistent to making the fundamental changes necessary to address the issue of disproportionality.

Territoriality and separatism is also a challenge. In order to address disproportionality, departments that historically have operated independent of each other must work together (e.g., bilingual education, general education, special education, etc.). This is one of the cornerstones of the IST process and one of the big hurdles to overcome. The colleges and universities around the state reflect this separatism because most of the departments of general education and special education function independently and with little collaboration on curriculum and course requirements. This, however, is starting to change. The Chief of the Division of Technical Assistance would like to see the classroom used as a laboratory and on-going training site beyond the traditional student teaching placement. As teachers are exposed to new instructional methods, they must have a chance to try them out. This is one way that educators will become more comfortable embracing a classroom of students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

## School District Case Studies

Conway Public Schools, Arkansas
Pulaski County Special School District, Arkansas
Bernalillo Public Schools, New Mexico
Bloomfield Public Schools, New Mexico
Santa Rosa Public Schools, New Mexico
Abington School District, Pennsylvania
Kennett Consolidated School District, Pennsylvania
Susquehanna Township School District, Pennsylvania

## Conway Public Schools, Arkansas

### *Background*

Conway, Arkansas is a growing community. It appeals to people because it is a small city less than an hour's drive from a large metropolitan area--Little Rock. Many residents commute to Little Rock although there is an industrial base, a four-year university, and a Baptist college in the immediate area. It is a very active community with an array of services for its residents.

Conway Public Schools (CPS) has a student population of 7,160, which makes it a medium to large-size school district by Arkansas standards. There are 11 schools in the district--8 elementary, 1 middle, 1 junior high, 1 senior high. Eighty-three percent of the student body is White, 15 percent Black, and 2 percent other. There are 826 students classified as disabled and served under IDEA, which is 8.7 percent of the student population. Seventy-one percent of the students with disabilities are White and 28 percent Black. Data suggest that a disproportionately high number of Black students are classified as having the following disabilities: mental retardation, specific learning disability, and speech impairment.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

Before CPS received notification from the State Education Agency (SEA) that data indicated a relatively high number of Black students were receiving special education services, CPS had begun to revise their eligibility procedures. As a result of the revision process, CPS realized that there may be a problem with disproportionality.

Eight years ago, when the SEA first analyzed the special education data by race, the press obtained these data through the Freedom of Information Act and released them to the public before the school districts were informed. There was no public outcry and not one question from the Conway community or CPS school board. The topic has never come up at a school board meeting. The local paper called to inquire about CPS's planned response and strategies, and information was provided.

Fewer than ten Black parents have inquired about this issue over the years, and these inquiries have focused on their own child at the time of evaluation or placement. One Black parent refused evaluation on the grounds that once his child was "in" special education, he may never get out. No concern or inquiry related to disproportionality has ever gone to the appeal level. The school system administration is concerned about this issue, but the high cost of special education evaluation and services for any student is a strong motivator of that concern.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

Prior to notification from the SEA, CPS was already collecting data on students referred for evaluation which provided information on disproportionality (e.g., school of origin, referring person, grade level, race/ethnic group, gender, yes/no eligibility). Data are sent to the CPS central office for analysis at the end of each school year. The data are disaggregated by school, gender, and race. Results of the analysis are sent to the schools and central office staff contact each school to see if they need any assistance in this area. These data are also sent to the superintendent, which puts pressure on the schools to address any "problems."

When CPS was notified by the SEA that their data suggested disproportionality, CPS was encouraged to develop a *Minority Overrepresentation Plan*, including strategies to address this issue. School system officials were advised that such a plan would put them in a less vulnerable position in the event that there are questions about a particular student or disproportionality in general. CPS staff have attended SEA-sponsored training sessions over the years on writing Minority Overrepresentation Plans.

CPS now writes a Minority Overrepresentation plan every year. (See Appendix C) Over the years, the plans have been modified and appended, but nothing has been deleted. This past year the most changes were made, which is probably due to the fact that the plan was developed by a committee rather than a few supervisory staff. This year's committee was comprised of general and special educators, as well as individuals from minority racial/ethnic groups in the community. The committee of nine included, among others, a school psychology specialist, coordinator of the homeless program, and the equity coordinator. (The equity coordinator is responsible for minority recruitment, and grievances and compliance related to minority issues.) Parent participation was discussed, but no parent was included. The committee made recommendations to the special education director, who then had the authority to add items to the Plan.

One of the long-standing items on the Plan is *bi-racial staffing* of students from minority racial/ethnic groups, which means at least one member of the staffing team must be from a minority racial/ethnic group. During the staffings, evaluation/assessment information on the student is reviewed and minutes are taken. The team comes up with a list of recommendations, and the school psychology specialist brings this list back to the school. All attending team members sign a statement indicating that they are in agreement with the recommendations. A disability determination is not made at this staffing.

It is the responsibility of the minority staff member to make sure all relevant issues are discussed and considered in regard to educational services for that minority student. If the minority person on the staffing team has remained quiet during the staffing, the chairperson asks for input on these issues directly. The issue that has come up most often is misinterpretation of the child's actions or behavior due to cultural or ethnic differences (e.g., lack of eye contact, tolerance for high activity.)

Four years ago the local director of special education assumed supervisory responsibility for all federal programs, including Chapter I/Title I and Compensatory Education. A needs assessment committee was formed--made up of a broad group of individuals, including university staff--to examine all supplemental programs. Examination included review of literature and contact with individuals across the state. This resulted in a more efficient and integrated approach to providing services to students in need of educational support. Prior to this, too many students were being referred for special education services who could be served in other ways. Now, for example, there are reading specialists who serve 60 children a day in small groups. Teachers feel that they have an option which they did not have before. According to the local director of special education, this has lowered the referral rate. Also, changes in Title I are driving change at the school level because of the requirement to write school plans which are integrated into the district and state plan. This requirement is being used as a tool to stimulate change.

CPS has invested in system-wide training on new teaching techniques and classroom strategies, with the goal of giving teachers more tools. All supplemental services staff (e.g., speech therapists, special education teachers) are trained to be resources to the general education teachers, not set themselves up as "experts." They are encouraged to teach model lessons and do co-teaching. Effective teaching strategies are modeled, and mutual trust and respect develops. Staff members learn what other staff members can offer them when they work together. Materials from the supplemental service programs are made available to general education staff through a check-out system, and these materials are well used.

CPS has found that it is most effective to address the issue of appropriate referral through another topic area, Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), which is of great interest to schools now. There is a surge in the number of students obtaining documentation of ADD/ADHD from physicians and demanding services from the schools. A disproportionately high number of these children are White and middle class.

The local university has been involved by analyzing needs assessment data, making recommendations for program development, and providing staff training. Also, the departments of education and special education in the university have been merged; and now, for example, all teachers--general and special--are well versed in techniques for teaching reading.

## Pulaski County Special School District, Arkansas

### *Background*

The Pulaski County school district covers 785 square miles and surrounds the cities of Little Rock and North Little Rock in a donut-shape. The district encompasses cities and rural areas. There are 37 schools in the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD), which enrolled 20,420 students in 1994-95. Sixty-seven percent of the student population is White, 31 percent Black, and two percent other. According to the associate director of special education, the student population is very mobile. The shape of the school district and the presence of an air force base in the district contribute to the high mobility rate.

The number of students classified as disabled and served under IDEA, as of December 1994, totaled 2,288 (8.9% of the student population). Sixty-three percent of the students receiving special education were White and 36 percent were Black, compared to 67 percent White and 31 percent Black in the total student population. Data disaggregated by disability classification indicate that 59 percent of the students classified as mentally retarded were Black.

PCSSD has been involved in desegregation litigation since 1984. The legal proceedings relate to facilities, programs, personnel, and instruction. In the area of instruction, special, gifted, and multicultural education have been the targeted areas. Over the years, there have been significant changes in boundaries and resulting revenues. The courts have supervised and monitored PCSSD's desegregation efforts in various ways. In the early years, there was a court-appointed *special master*, then a *metropolitan supervisor*, and currently an *Office of Desegregation Monitoring Team* of 6-8 members. PCSSD submits desegregation plans to these "arms of the court" and status conferences are held periodically. Although it is not within the scope of this case study to examine all the issues and details of these legal proceedings, it is important to note that the impact has been great and the litigation effects every decision the school district makes.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

About ten years ago, as a result of the desegregation litigation and accusations of overt and covert discrimination, PCSSD began collecting enrollment data for special programs, disaggregated by race. When it became clear that a disproportionately high number of Black students were receiving special education services, administrators and special educators expressed concern that efforts to address this disproportionality may make special education services less available to students who could not function in the general education classroom. General educators were also concerned about not having special education support available. These concerns still exist today.

According to the associate director of special education, PCSSD takes the position that, in the absence of discriminatory referral, evaluation, or placement procedures, disproportionality is not viewed negatively. Students who are not meeting the challenges of the classroom must be provided an appropriate education.

Initially, the community did not pay much attention to the desegregation litigation or the issue of disproportionality. This changed when school boundaries and busing plans were altered. It is difficult to get a "clear reading" on the community's reaction to disproportionality because the related legal proceedings have been protracted and confusing, at times, to the public. One lawyer represents the Black parents in the desegregation case and this is the primary way that the school system gets reaction from the Black parent community. When PCSSD set up strict eligibility criteria for special education, some Black parents came forward to complain that their children were not getting the educational support they needed. There continues to be a few parents who express this concern every year.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

PCSSD uses two main strategies to address disproportionality: rigorous collection of data by race and gender, and screening and pre-referral intervention. Early race data from the schools were not accurate because school staff were not trained to collect these data in a systematic fashion. Immediately after the first court ruling, all school district forms were modified to include race and gender. Some schools use computerized data collection, but this depends on the interest and knowledge level of the principal. The entire district is moving in the direction of computerized data collection.

With data in hand, PCSSD expects every school to identify and monitor problem areas, as well as examine policies and procedures to determine where change is necessary. The schools have come to understand that this is part of making a school function effectively. As a result of the desegregation court order, the district as a whole is continuing to learn how to understand data and use it as a basis for discussion and change.

PCSSD has emphasized screening and pre-referral intervention for ten years. As a result of the desegregation court order, every school is required to have a *local screening plan* and *local screening committee*. This committee must be bi-racial (i.e., one member must be Black) and consist of three persons in addition to the referring teacher. This is intended to be a brainstorming and trouble-shooting body made up of staff that can objectively discuss students who are not making adequate progress in the general education classroom. The team may recommend interventions such as behavior management consultation, the use of a parent volunteer, or Chapter I/Title I services. The committee must document in writing the interventions that have been tried prior to referral for special education services. The schools were given a sample form for documentation, and most chose to use this form rather than develop their own. The form includes relevant health and medical information.

The district-level staff work with the local schools to help them develop an effective screening committee, but each school is expected to develop procedures that suit their needs, including the frequency of committee meetings and the trial period for recommended interventions. The basic concept of the local screening committee has not changed over the ten-year period.

For three years, there was a *central office committee* that reviewed the decisions of the local committee for all kindergarten students and all Black students. This second-level screening was discontinued because the local screening committee began to minimize their responsibility and act as if its decisions were inconsequential. This was counterproductive for the central administrative staff who wanted to encourage local school responsibility and decision making, as well as reduce central office burden. However, it took nearly two years to obtain clearance from the courts to make this change.

A three person, *bi-racial central office committee* continues to review the initial diagnosis of all new kindergarten referrals to special education and all new Black student referrals to special education. This centralized review functions primarily to rule out diagnoses based on racial/ethnic factors. The committee responsibilities rotate among approximately 15 people--psychologists and other supervisory staff. The associate director of special education monitors and regularly attends committee meetings even though she is not technically a member of the committee. According to the associate director of special education, this bi-racial review process has been well-received by staff at all levels.

In order to monitor the referral-to-classification rate, PCSSD began collecting data on the percentage of students classified as disabled following referral for evaluation. The district set 80 percent as the target for the percentage of students classified as disabled following referral. If a lower percentage of students is classified, then this may suggest "over referral" on the part of the school and that the local screening committee is not as effective as it should be in recommending classroom modifications and pre-referral interventions. When data suggest over referral, the local school is provided training on more effective interventions and characteristics of students with disabilities.

PCSSD has two special education instructional coordinators--one for the elementary and one for the secondary level. These coordinators are in the schools often and become acquainted with the staff. They respond to the needs of the staff by providing school-based training for small groups, a whole school, or several schools in close proximity. Training sessions are held at a time chosen by the participants (e.g., lunch hour, planning periods, after school). Training is typically interactive in nature and tailored to the specific needs of the group. This has proved to be a successful training strategy for PCSSD because it is flexible and can be used as follow-up to a larger, perhaps district-wide, training session. When the department of special education identifies a broad-based training need, they approach the department of staff development, which has a budget to provide training. The department of staff development has been very receptive to suggestions and tries to accommodate requests as much as possible.

The emphasis on screening and pre-referral intervention has necessitated developing and maintaining a close working relationship between general and special education. This is facilitated by the administrative placement of both special and general education under the assistant superintendent for instruction. It has been critical to keep all the supervisory (content) staff in the division of instruction informed each and every step along the way, especially since the special education staff does not have any supervisory function in regard to general education staff. For example, the science supervisor/coordinator is informed of changes and gives that information to the science teachers. Articles in education journals that are in keeping with the pre-referral strategies being promoted may be passed on to science teachers informally by special education staff.

It is critical to have guidelines and information regarding screening and pre-referral intervention communicated directly from the superintendent's office to the principals. This supports the principal as the instructional and administrative leader for the entire school, and facilitates a collective school responsibility for every student regardless of his/her educational needs. Collaboration between general and special education is enhanced when special education staff know more about the content areas. With increased content knowledge, special education staff are better able to make suggestions for classroom and teaching modifications.

## Bernalillo Public Schools, New Mexico

### *Background*

Bernalillo, New Mexico is about 15 miles north of Albuquerque. It is adjacent to the interstate highway which connects the capitol, Santa Fe, with Albuquerque. With 3,616 students, Bernalillo Public Schools (BPS) is a slightly above average size school district in New Mexico. BPS consists of six elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school. The district has site-based management, which means that the school communities are very involved in decision-making regarding the use of resources.

The student body is 47 percent Hispanic, 40 percent Native American, 12 percent Anglo, and less than one percent other. Two Native American languages are spoken by students in the BPS, as well as Spanish and English. The superintendent of BPS, who has been on the job for four years, is Hispanic and a native of New Mexico. The school board is made up of five members--three Hispanic and two Native American.

Four hundred and ninety-six (496) students in BPS are classified as disabled and are served under IDEA; this is 14 percent of the total student population. Forty-eight percent of the students receiving special education services are Hispanic, 36 percent are Native American, 15 percent are Anglo, and one percent are other. While these data do not indicate disproportionality, a closer examination suggests a relatively high number of Anglo and Hispanic students classified as seriously emotionally disturbed and Native American students classified as multihandicapped.

Five different Native American tribes or *pueblos* live in the school district, and each have their own customs and culture. The pueblos vary in their openness to, and acceptance of, the Anglo culture and educational system. One of the pueblos has a tribal school, which is not under the jurisdiction of BPS. Two of the pueblos have elementary schools on the reservation, which means the children do not attend school with children off the reservation until they enter high school. According to the director of special education, this reinforces the natural tendency for students to associate with those most like them. There is tension between the students from the different pueblos, especially at the middle school level. Many of the upper socioeconomic Anglo families in the district send their children to private schools when they reach middle-school age.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

Informal observation and anecdotal information suggested a disproportionately high number of Hispanic and Native American students in certain disability classifications before "hard" data became available from the New Mexico State Department of Education. BPS does not believe that inappropriate classification of disabilities is a major problem in the district because their students face many academic challenges and need support. The general community is not aware of the special education data.

At the beginning of each school year, BPS staff meet with the governors of the five pueblos about their issues and concerns. In January, when new governors take office, another meeting takes place. Each of the governors has expressed concern to the current director of special education about the number of Native American young people receiving special education services and the benefit of these services. In the past, there have been formal complaints about the length of time between referral and initiation of services for Native American students with disabilities.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

One of the most effective ways to address disproportionality, according to the director of special education, is to use liaisons from the local ethnic communities to work with parents, staff, and students. The liaisons bring official school information directly to families, facilitate communication, and attend assessments and meetings. Sometimes families prefer the liaison to represent them at the meetings. The liaisons also do informal training for BPS. If BPS wants the participation of a family, administrative staff meet with the governor of the pueblo about the issue. The governor will then use staff to get the family and student involved.

The Bilingual, Indian Education, and Chapter I program staffs are available to help determine the appropriate support for a student having difficulty in the classroom. A speech/language pathologist is working with someone from the bilingual team on a screening questionnaire for students whose first language is not English. The purpose of this screening tool is to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals for special education services.

A university consultant provides training to general and special educators on the acquisition of Native American languages and the impact of switching from a home language, which is primarily used for conversation, to English, which is primarily used for academics. With this information, it is hoped that staff will be able to assess learning needs more accurately and provide necessary supports without accessing special education services inappropriately. IDEA-Part B monies and Bilingual Education monies funds activities such as these.

BPS recently surveyed all school staff and community agencies to obtain a comprehensive picture of the services available for students and their families. The goal is to compile a resource document of these services and distribute it widely. With information available on such services as crisis management and on-going therapy, it is hoped that school staff will tap into these support services before labeling students as disabled. In the past, special education would have been contacted for this type of support.

At the beginning of each school year, BPS takes all new staff and any interested veteran staff on a tour of the reservations. Each governor or a designee talks with the new staff about their pueblo. Topics covered include educational aspirations for their children, cultural taboos, tribal functions, and use of the native language in the schools. In addition, BPS utilizes local staff to provide training in the area of cultural sensitivity for new and non-local veteran staff.

According to the director of special education, BPS encourages *strength identification* rather than *deficit identification* in students. The goal is to capitalize on student strengths to create a positive learning environment. BPS teachers are expected to work with a diverse set of students in their classrooms, even though this may a different job than the one they took five, ten, or twenty years ago. BPS will support teachers by providing special educators as resources and special education staff are expected to work in the classrooms with general education staff. In the past, there were separate curriculum committees for general education, special education, vocational education, etc. Now there is one committee overseeing one curriculum, which facilitates the collaboration process. The superintendent and school board are strongly behind these policies. Many of the teachers are embracing these changes and there is effective collaboration occurring in several schools. For example, at the high school they have divided the students and staff into *families*, and they use a team approach to address the needs of the students.

BPS has made it a priority to recruit and hire teachers who are sensitive to the cultural characteristics of the community and who have the training and experience to employ a variety of strategies in the classroom. The school district has an attractive salary scale relative to the other New Mexico school districts, which is an important incentive for recruitment. BPS prefers to hire teachers with dual endorsement, and higher salaries are offered to attract such teachers. In addition, BPS is trying to obtain grant money to support teachers while they obtain dual endorsement.

## Bloomfield Public Schools, New Mexico

### *Background*

Bloomfield, New Mexico is located in the northwest corner of the state, about three hours from Albuquerque by car. It is a rural area, which is struggling economically. The local oil fields employ many of the residents. Bloomfield Public Schools (BPS) enrolled 3,533 students during the 1994-95 school year. The student population represents the diversity of the community--42 percent Anglo, 30 percent Native American, 27 percent Hispanic, and less than 1 percent other.

BPS has six schools that serve students in grades K-12. One school serves K-6, one K-2, one 3-5, one 6-7, one 8-9, and one 10-12. The schools were set up this way as a desegregation strategy because students tend to live in ethnically segregated communities. Otherwise, "neighborhood" K-6 elementary schools would have been segregated, and when the students reached middle school they would have had little experience with a diverse student body. This arrangement, however, results in many transitions throughout a student's school years.

Five hundred and thirty-five (535) students in BPS are classified as disabled and served under IDEA, 15 percent of the student body. Of those students, 40 percent are Anglo, 35 percent are Native American, 24 percent are Hispanic, and less than 1 percent are other. Although these district-wide data do not indicate significant disproportionality, closer examination reveals a disproportionately high number of Hispanic students classified as mentally retarded, Anglos classified as seriously emotionally disturbed, and Native Americans receiving ancillary speech and language services. Data indicate that a disproportionately low number of Anglos are receiving ancillary speech and language services.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

Three years ago when a new superintendent was hired, the BPS school board (composed of two Native Americans, one Hispanic and two Anglos) commissioned a comprehensive self study as part of a five-year school improvement plan. The self study included disaggregating special education and gifted enrollment data by ethnicity. Because of community concern about disproportionality, BPS now collects disaggregated enrollment data, which they refer to as *quality indicators*.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

*BPS has a number of programs and initiatives in place that address disproportionality. These are discussed below. It is important to note, however, that many of these were put into place to address other concerns before disproportionality became an issue.*

The primary school (K-2) has *family grouping*, where a team of teachers, including one special educator, works with a group of students. The special education teacher may do reading and math for everyone, with the support of the other teachers. In this fashion all students and staff work together, and there is collective ownership of the students in the family. Family grouping has been in place for two school years and some modest student gains have been observed. The local director of special education expects it will take about five years to refine this strategy and "work out the bugs." One criticism is too much emphasis on social skills.

BPS has bilingual Navajo and bilingual Spanish programs. When a Navajo or Spanish-speaking student is having trouble in the classroom, this is the first source of support for student and teacher. Another source of non-special education support is the *Chapter 1/Title 1 Reading and Language Lab*. Before these programs existed, the students were referred for special education services.

In BPS, related service personnel provide services to students, particularly in a group, who are not classified as disabled but may need support in the early elementary years. Attention to students in these early years not only gives them the support they need to succeed, but gives the school system more accurate information with which to make a determination about a disability at a later point, if necessary.

BPS has begun to work on *criteria for referral*--what should the classroom teacher and school screening committee look at before they even make a referral. The goal is to establish a set of criteria that would help distinguish between a disability and a classroom problem due to language, culture or socioeconomic issues. BPS currently gathers information from family members and teachers regarding the student's language skills and home language environment in order that a disability label is not attached to a student inappropriately. Also, the diagnosticians are now using IQ tests with norms for Navajo students.

There are a number of new diagnosticians in BPS who have worked with students from diverse backgrounds in other school districts. They have been encouraged to share information with their BPS colleagues, which has enhanced the ethnic and cultural knowledge of the staff.

Over the past three years, BPS has made a concerted effort to hire staff that represent the diversity of the community, especially Hispanic and Native American teachers. One strategy they have tried is to recruit in other states. The school district has an informal mentoring-type program for new Hispanic staff to help solve problems and get them involved in the community. The goal of this program is to retain the staff they have successfully recruited.

BPS provides a cultural orientation for new teachers. Each new teacher also receives a book on cultural issues and goes on a tour of the reservations. On-going support for cultural issues is informal. Educational Assistants (EAs) from the community offer non-local staff guidance on cultural and ethnic issues. BPS tries to get these paraprofessionals into degree programs relatively close to home. EAs have ties to the community and are less likely to leave the area; whereas, professionals with no ties tend to leave after a year or so.

The current president of the Navajo nation is advocating for *alternative teacher certification* on the grounds that current certification requirements severely reduce the number of Navajo teachers who are qualified to teach. For example, bilingual certification requires eight-grade proficiency, and many native speakers are deterred by this requirement.

## Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools, New Mexico

### *Background*

Santa Rosa, New Mexico is about 115 miles east of Albuquerque. The area is sparsely populated, but accessible by major roads. The biggest employers in the area are the Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools (SRCS) and a large truck stop on the main road. Other residents are employed in the small restaurants and motels. Unemployment is high in some areas of this school district. With 939 students, SRCS is a small-size school district in New Mexico. There are four school sites--one elementary school, one K-8, one middle school, and one high school. The student body is 91 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Anglo, 1 percent Asian, and less than 1 percent other.

One hundred and twenty-four (124) students, 13.2 percent of the total student population, are classified as disabled and served under IDEA. Of the students receiving special education services, 89 percent are Hispanic, 10 percent are Anglo, and 1 percent are other. While these data do not indicate disproportionality, a closer examination suggests a relatively high number of Anglo students classified as seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) and learning disabled. However, included are students with SED, placed in a local group home by court order, from out of the district. The number of Hispanic students classified as SED appears to be disproportionately low.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

SRCS became aware of disproportionality as a result of collecting data for the New Mexico State Department of Education (NMSDE) and receiving NMSDE data print outs. These data have not been reported to the community or the school board. Disproportionality is not a priority for the administration because neither parents nor the community have expressed concern. The community views the provision of special education services as a way to help their students. The director of special education meets with the eight special education teachers in the district about once a month, and neither cultural/racial issues nor disproportionality have been raised as a concern.

The school board recently inquired about the total number of students classified as disabled. SRCS's classification rate is 13.2 percent, which is the same as the state referral rate. The classification rate is of particular concern at one school. The administration is in the process of exploring this matter.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

*SRCS does not have a specific plan or distinct set of initiatives directed at correcting disproportionality; however, the following strategies being implemented in SRCS were identified as those that address disproportionality, albeit in an indirect way.*

All of the schools in SRCS have cultural programs to promote cultural/ethnic pride, and the district employs a high percentage of Hispanic teachers. Although these teachers conduct classes in English, they are sensitive to the cultural issues of the Hispanic students. Many of the teachers are from the community, who have gone away for training and returned to teach in their home community. In recent years the school board and superintendent have supported salary increases for teachers, bringing their salary ranking from the lowest in the state to number 12 in a seven-year period. This has been an incentive for teachers to stay in the area.

SRCS has a bilingual education program and a bilingual diagnostician (Spanish/English) to support the needs of students whose primary language is Spanish. This is not a special education service. The director of special education, who is also assistant to the superintendent in charge of general instructional matters, periodically reviews the screening and pre-referral process at the schools. Alternative instructional methods and support services (e.g., bilingual education program) are encouraged prior to referral for special education services.

SRCS staff have attended NMSDE-sponsored meetings and workshops on disproportionality in other parts of the state. In addition, plans are underway to conduct training for general education staff on the topic of pre-referral intervention and special education services. SRCS prefers to bring consultants to the district for training sessions, rather than send staff to workshops in other parts of the state which would take them out of the classroom for longer periods of time. The Regional Cooperative Center, located at Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico has helped SRCS locate appropriate consultants. In March of 1995, SRCS installed satellites for distance learning, which opens up new options for training.

The special education directors and directors of instruction in the six districts adjacent to Santa Rosa meet regularly to discuss issues and concerns, as well as share information, materials and solutions to common problems. This is a valuable support system. Disproportionality in regard to gifted education has been discussed in those meetings.

## Abington School District, Pennsylvania

### *Background*

Abington Township is located in suburban Philadelphia. It is an older suburb, with a reputation for high socioeconomic status. However, unlike several of the surrounding communities, Abington is also home to a less privileged population as well. Just under 10 percent of the Abington School District's (ASD) school population receives a free or reduced lunch. ASD enrolled 6700 students during the 1994-95 school year, which makes it a medium-size school district in Pennsylvania. School enrollment has been on the rise over the past several years. Currently, nine schools make up ASD--seven elementary, one junior high, and one senior high school.

The ASD student population is 79 percent White, 15 percent African American, 5 percent Asian, and 1 percent Hispanic. There is currently one minority (African American) on the nine-member school board. The percentage of students from minority racial/ethnic groups has roughly doubled in the past decade. According to the assistant superintendent, the school district has a reputation for educational excellence and high academic standards; more than 80 percent of the students go on to some form of higher education.

Data from the 1992-93 school year (the most recent data made available) indicate disproportionality in three major disability categories--specific learning disability, serious emotional disturbance, and mental retardation. The percentage of African American students in these categories is 25, 23, and 21, respectively, compared to 15 percent in the total school population.

According to the director of special education, a significant percentage of students come into ASD already identified as disabled. For example, between July 1, 1994 and January 26, 1995, 39 students entered the school district with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) from other jurisdictions. This occurs for several reasons--families move into the district because of its good reputation for special education services, and foster care placements are made in this community from Philadelphia.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

ASD has known for about ten years that a disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receive special education services. This was a number of years before the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) cited ASD as being disproportionate in several disability areas. Concern about this issue has come from the principals and has been discussed at the *principals' council.* This council includes principals, central administrative staff, the assistant superintendent, and the superintendent. Because money for support services, both special and non-special education, has become more scarce over the years, principals are taking a closer look at the type of students that require extra support and the type of support needed.

ASD staff have met with PDE staff to explain the special education data from the district's perspective. Of particular concern are the following two issues: students entering the district with IEPs, and students being served in ASD in a consortium arrangement. When a high percentage of students in the two aforementioned categories are from minority racial/ethnic groups, ASD's special education data is more likely to appear disproportionate.

ASD has a human relations board, established in the 1960's, which meets four times a year. This board is comprised of school system and community leaders from minority and non-minority groups. The board currently includes African American members, but no members from the Asian community. This board has not expressed concern about disproportionality, but has addressed two other related issues--recruitment of African American staff and representation of the African American experience in the K-12 curriculum. A revised recruitment policy was adopted several years ago and a thorough analysis of the curriculum is underway.

The parent community has not voiced concern to school district officials about disproportionality. In fact, the interviewees commented that they have been told that families often move into the district to receive special education services. However, some of the African American community leaders have privately expressed concern about the relatively few African American students in programs for the gifted. But this concern has not become a public issue.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

Over the last four years, every elementary school in ASD has established an active and state-validated *Instructional Support Team* (IST). The role of the IST, mandated by the 1990 Pennsylvania Special Education Regulations and Standards, is to identify effective instructional approaches for students prior to referral for special education services. State funds are provided to the districts to initiate the IST and offset the cost of an *instructional support teacher*. (The amended state law mandates such a team in at least one elementary school in each district by the 1994-95 school year.) The IST concept is also in place in the junior high school.

ASD embraced the IST concept and sought state training. The state trained the ISTs, including the instructional support teacher, but ASD trained the school staff on how to access and use the IST. Four to six training sessions were held at each school. The training sessions were mandatory paid sessions, which were in line with the negotiated teacher contracts. ISTs were phased in over a four-year period, with a maximum of two schools beginning the process each school year. One of the reasons the IST effort was successful is that three major departments--Curriculum, Pupil Services and Special Education--collaborated. Also, ASD already had strong support services available; only a structure for coordinating action plans for students was needed.

According to the assistant superintendent, as a result of establishing ISTs, special education enrollment is no longer growing at the rate it was in the past. Also, principals take more ownership for all the programs in their buildings and have a heightened awareness of what problems can be solved with solid instructional procedures and good action plans. Principals have learned to access community services and use existing school services and personnel more flexibly (i.e., without adding personnel or creating new types of support). School staff now realize that the special education system in and of itself is not a panacea.

The assistant superintendent presented the *corrective action plan* (CAP) developed by an elementary school with a disproportionately high number of African American students receiving special education services. This CAP focuses on general education practices such as pre-referral intervention and solid educational practices. The first part of the CAP is a discussion of the students in the school currently receiving services, including the socioeconomic, family, and medical factors contributing to the need for such services. With this information presented, the CAP makes a commitment to the following:

- continuing the IST model
- implementing behavioral intervention
- expanding relationships with outside agencies
- developing a parent support network
- revising the Chapter I program to be an early intervention program
- training the teaching staff to use effective instructional techniques/support (e.g., curriculum adaptation, curriculum-based assessment, flexible grouping, cooperative learning)
- implementing conflict resolution & peer medication

The special education director emphasized that special education is not *a place*, but a system of support services available to students. No student enrolled in one of ASD's nine schools spends the full school day in a special education classroom. This is the true even for students with disabilities who have recently returned to the community from out-of-district placements.

ASD takes a firm stand that students with conduct disorders should not be labeled *seriously emotionally disturbed* (SED) and classified as disabled. Conduct disorders are handled in several ways. First of all, behavior and classroom management is an integral part of the IST process, typically addressed by the school psychologist on the team. (The instructional support teacher focuses more on the academic and curricular issues.) At the same time that a classroom management plan is being developed and implemented by the IST, resources in the community are also being pursued. ASD has strict guidelines for conduct and matters relating to weapons and drugs. An infraction may result in exclusion from school. At the junior high school there is an in-school suspension room, where student freedom is severely limited. A high school student may be provided individual tutoring at an elementary school. An *alternative education program* is in the planning stages (a non-special education service). At the junior and senior high schools there is an on-site probation officer, and a good relationship exists between the Abington Police Department, Juvenile Probation, and ASD. This sends a strong message to the students about compliance with the school policies.

About 25 percent of the elementary teaching staff has been replaced over the last few years as a result of retirement. During the interview process, prospective staff are asked about such things as *flexible grouping* and *cooperative learning* to make sure that their training and experience would fit with the mission and orientation of this school district. It is a board policy that minority candidates will be actively recruited for positions in ASD. The assistant superintendent and one African American teacher work with a group of community leaders to establish linkages with historically Black colleges and universities and other potential sources of applicants.

Several years ago, the superintendent established a district-wide multicultural sensitivity committee. This committee, in turn, spurred the establishment of such an entity in all nine schools. One of the tasks of the school-based committees is to provide quality professional development on multicultural issues. In the 1994-95 school year, ASD identified *multicultural issues* as one of the five major areas of need. An initiatives committee examined a broad array of multicultural issues (e.g., curriculum, hiring, training) with the goal of determining what is appropriate for the school district. The committee's recommendations will be incorporated into the strategic plan required by the state. New staff orientation includes training on working with a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual student body.

The interviewees described an array of public and private services for children and their families, which suggests that interagency linkages and community support are strong in Abington Township. The religious and ethnic communities have a history of pride, and strong networks exist in those communities. For example, in response to the beating death of a youngster in the community, the Abington Community Taskforce (ACT) was created to address a variety of issues. ACT has about 40 members from religious/ethnic organizations (e.g., churches, synagogues), service organizations, law enforcement agencies, mental health services, and the school system. One of ACT's activities is youth/teen counseling and conflict resolution, and ACT has secured funding to operate these support services in the community. ASD does staff training every year on interagency support for students. This training involves bringing representatives from community agencies to talk with school staff about available services for students and families.

## Kennett Consolidated School District, Pennsylvania

### *Background*

Kennett Square is located in the southeastern corner of Pennsylvania, less than an hour from Wilmington, Delaware by car. For generations, the Kennett Square area was a rural agrarian community that had its economic base in the mushroom industry. It is still known as the *mushroom capitol of the world*. In recent years, the area has become more suburban, with an increasing number of commuter residents who work in the chemical industry in the Wilmington metropolitan area. Many of these newer residents are upper middle class, which is increasing the economic diversity in the community. Ethnic and cultural diversity has been present for generations because the mushroom industry has attracted Latino workers, and African Americans came via the *underground railroad*.

Kennett Consolidated School District (KCSD) enrolled 2833 students during the 1994-95 school year, which is a small-size district by Pennsylvania standards. KCSD is comprised of five schools--three elementary (K-6), one middle (7-8), and one high (9-12). The student population represents the diversity of the community--75 percent White, 15 percent Latino, 8 percent African American, and 2 percent Asian. The Latino students are primarily children of Mexican-born parents, who work in the mushroom industry. Some of those workers are migrants. Many of the parents of the Mexican students cannot read English or Spanish. KCSD is struggling with how to create culturally diverse schools while at the same time preserve the *neighborhood school*. The school board and the superintendent want the school to be the center of the community.

One hundred ninety-nine (199) students in KCSD are classified as disabled and served under IDEA, which is 7 percent of the total student population. Of those students, 67 percent are White, 17 percent are Latino, 15 percent are African American, and 1 percent are Asian. Overall, 25 percent of the student population comes from minority racial/ethnic groups and 33 percent of the students classified as disabled are from minority racial/ethnic groups.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

KCSD has been collecting special education data disaggregated by race for about a decade. These data are collected along with other data on students (e.g., test scores, extracurricular and sports participation by race). The purpose of this data collection, according to the superintendent, is to monitor changes, confirm or dispute observation/perceptions, and ultimately to improve the educational program for students. Initially, attention was drawn to the issue of disproportionality because of the relatively few students from minority racial/ethnic groups in programs for the gifted.

When KCSD received notification from the State Education Agency (SEA) that the number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services appeared to be disproportionately high and that a *Corrective Action Plan (CAP)* was necessary, the administration was surprised. The surprise was due to the fact that KCSD was already addressing this issue. Although KCSD is interested in addressing this issue, when the superintendent presented data on disproportionality at a public board meeting, little interest was expressed. (Of nine school board members, one is African American.) Occasionally an individual parent will express concern about his/her child being classified as disabled.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

According to the superintendent and director of instruction and special education, major curricular and instructional changes for KCSD as a whole are the basis of the CAP. (The CAP for the 1994-95 school year can be found in Appendix D). These changes involve training, materials, and human support for teachers, as well as diversifying instruction and increasing heterogeneous grouping. According to the superintendent, the changes are directed at all students, disabled and non-disabled, with the goal of providing a learning environment which is appropriate and challenging for students with diverse learning needs. High expectations for all students is a key element.

When the KCSD staff were informed that there was a problem with disproportionality, this information was accompanied by a set of strategies to address the problem. However, according to the superintendent and director of special education, teachers were not just handed a packet of changes to implement, they were involved in every phase of the selection and development process. The superintendent has been available to meet with administrators and principals along the way to address concerns and issues related to the changes being implemented. Also, a committee of parents was invited to a meeting to discuss systemic changes in the academic program and its delivery.

In order to make major curricular and instructional changes, KCSD has committed to an long-term two-pronged training plan. One prong is provided by the University of Pennsylvania in the form of a school-year length course on integrated reading/language arts instruction. This is a practical applications course, not theory. The course in held at the local middle school twice a month. KCSD covers the tuition costs, and teachers receive three credit hours for successful completion of the course. All certified teachers are eligible for the course and the goal is to have every teacher complete the course. The second part of the training plan is mentoring from a consultant on creating and implementing an *integrated curriculum*. This consultant works with teachers on site to develop themes. Teachers are given release time to develop integrated curriculum materials and work in small groups with the consultant over a period of months. This whole process is monitored closely by the director of instruction and special education to determine what is working and what needs to be changed.

KCSD has successfully used school district staff and other local professionals to support other training efforts. Local trainers and consultants are effective because they are familiar with the community and student population. Such training activities have included cultural/ethnic awareness and sensitivity (presented to students and staff), teaching math to Latino and African American students, and developmental education (for primary teachers).

KCSD has a variety of services to support students with diverse backgrounds and learning needs. The *Even Start Program* provides early education experiences for children and their families. Most of the families in this program are Latino. KCSD now has an optional two-year kindergarten program, and the superintendent's goal is to have an ungraded K-2 primary program where each student progresses at his/her own rate. For children from migrant families, there is a three-level education program to accommodate their needs. This program also employs family outreach workers, who know the language and culture. These workers go into the community to educate the parents about learning opportunities.

Teachers are given adaptable materials and activities, which can be used with students at all levels. For differentiated instruction, students go to *learning centers* for *hands-on* activities. Concepts are reinforced for students, if needed, during *mini lessons*. The reading and resource teachers work in the classrooms to support students and teachers, and many of the special education teachers no longer have rooms of their own. This helps eliminate the notion that special education teachers work independently behind closed doors.

In addition, KCSD encourages parent involvement in the classroom as a way to support a particular student or the system in general. There used to be a policy that parents could not volunteer in their own child's classroom, but that policy has been changed.

Elementary-level Instructional Support Teams (IST) are mandated by Pennsylvania law, and the three KCSD teams are certified by the state. The IST includes an *instructional support teacher* and, typically, a psychologist and guidance counselor. The principal serves as the chairperson. When a student is having a problem in the classroom, the teacher presents the problem to the IST. The team develops a plan with the parent(s), drawing on such services as those discussed above. The *instructional support teacher* generally monitors the implementation of the plan and supports the teacher in anyway possible. He/she also conducts demonstration lessons and trains parents.

KCSD collects detailed longitudinal test data on all students to order to monitor progress. When a particular classroom or student does not make progress, the staff (administrators and classroom teachers) have a basis from which to begin their inquiry--to answer the questions *why?* and *what should be done?* Teachers and principals are trained in how to read such data and use it as a tool for developing classroom strategies and teacher training. These data may also be the basis for calling an IST meeting. In addition to having test data available, there is the expectation that building principals know each student. According to the superintendent, the more information KCSD has on each student the more likely there will be an appropriate educational program for each student.

When hiring new staff, KCSD looks for applicants who have the training and experience, as well as an interest in, teaching a diverse student population. KCSD seeks new hires who have an undergraduate degree in a content area and a masters degree in teaching. The superintendent speculates that a teacher with such credentials has the ability to think more abstractly than teachers typically did in the past. More often than not the most successful new hires in KCSD are recently-trained teachers.

## Susquehanna Township School District, Pennsylvania

### *Background*

Susquehanna Township is located on the northeast side of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Approximately 20,000 people live in the township and many work in downtown Harrisburg. Because of its close proximity to the city, the community has both an urban and suburban ambience. Susquehanna Township is populated with persons from a variety of ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. Although most of the residents would be considered middle class, there are pockets of poverty.

Susquehanna Township School District (STSD) enrolled 2652 students during the 1994-95 school year, which is a small to medium-size district by Pennsylvania standards. The student population has increased 25 percent over the last seven years. STSD is comprised of five schools--three elementary, one middle (6-8), and one high (9-12). The three elementary schools house different grades--one for all kindergarten students, one for grades one and two, and a third for grades three through five.

According to STSD's superintendent, families move into the school district, in part, because of the diverse student body and its high academic standards for all students. The student population is 71 percent White, 25 percent African American, 3 percent Asian, and 1 percent Hispanic. The composition of the student population has remained relatively constant over the past decade. The present school board consists of nine White members, but historically this board has been more representative of the community.

One hundred ninety-three (193) students in STSD were classified as disabled and served under IDEA in the 1994-95 school year, which is 7 percent of the total student population. Of those students, 25 were receiving *emotional support* and 168 *learning support*. Twenty-eight percent of the students receiving emotional support were African American, and 34 percent receiving learning support were African American. The percentage of African American students identified by STSD for emotional support is 33 percent. This percentage is referred to as the *corrected percentage*. The corrected percentage for learning support in 26 percent. These data suggest that STSD is identifying a disproportionately high number of African American students for emotional support.

### *Awareness of Disproportionality and Community Response*

In 1992, when STSD decided to assume responsibility for most students previously served by the intermediate unit, the district began tracking special education enrollment by race and gender. As a result of this data collection, the school district became aware of the disproportionate number of African American students receiving special education services. These numbers were a concern to the school district until they examined the data, student by student, and demonstrated, to their satisfaction, that students were not unfairly classified as disabled by STSD and a number of the African American students were actually classified as disabled in another school district. Corrected and uncorrected percentages are presented to the school board, community, and Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

When STSD received written notification from PDE that their data suggested a disproportionate number of African American students were receiving special education services, they were concerned about how much emphasis would be placed on numbers versus appropriate support for students. The superintendent stated that STSD wants to provide support to all students who need it, without stigmatizing them. Although special education services are expensive, reducing the special education numbers is not the top priority for STSD.

Parents from minority racial/ethnic groups have not raised concerns about disproportionality or questioned the motives for providing their children special education services. According to the superintendent, parents have been more apt to demand special education services deemed desirable.

### *Strategies that Address Disproportionality*

The strategies presented in this section were not explicitly designed by STSD to address disproportionality. According to the superintendent and the director of special education, these programs and initiatives were put into place over a period of years, as part of the school district's long-range and strategic plans, to enhance the total academic program and improve educational services for all students in the district. Goal #7 of STSD's new Strategic Plan specifically relates to the topic of disproportionality. It reads as follows: *Develop and Implement a Plan to Cultivate Sensitivity to the Needs of a Diverse Population*. A diverse group of 40 educators and community members developed this goal, and an "action committee" developed the following objectives to carry it out:

1. Establish a task force to oversee the implementation of Goal #7 of the STSD Strategic Plan.
2. Establish an ongoing educational program for all district personnel and students to develop knowledge of and sensitivity to diversity.
3. Communicate the district's philosophy on diversity to the parents and community and solicit their support.
4. Integrate activities and materials into the K-12 curriculum which represent the experiences and accomplishments of the world's diverse population.
5. Facilitate the assimilation of new students into the diverse environment of STSD.
6. Periodically review and update school district policies relative to our diverse population (i.e., minority recruitment, religious activities, practices and observances.)
7. Establish an emergency plan to deal with situations that could potentially be volatile because of the cultural diversity of our school district.
8. Develop programs that encourage minority students to pursue careers in which they are under-represented.

The strategies in this section speak to the eight objectives. The full text of Goal #7 can be found in Appendix E. STSD informs the community at large of the Strategic Plan, programs, accomplishments, and other issues through a newsletter, which is delivered vis U.S. Mail to every household in the Township of Susquehanna.

As early as kindergarten, students in STSD who are having difficulty in school are identified and placed in the *Early Success Program*. This program, which operates in the first and second grades, groups six or seven students having academic difficulty with 12 or 13 academic role models. These groups form a classroom with one teacher and one instructional aide. The non-Early Success classrooms are slightly larger at 23 students. There is frequent home contact in these early elementary years and families are encouraged to get involved with their child's education. Many parents want their children in Early Success classrooms because the classes are smaller and there are always two adults in the classroom. Unfortunately, the students in the Early Success Program are highly mobile, which means longitudinal data are limited.

If a student continues to have academic difficulty, the Instructional Support Team (IST) is available for support in the third, fourth and fifth grades. The IST Program is mandated by state regulation, and teams must be certified by the state. The IST in this school district concentrates on behavior and homework contracts, and other specific interventions.

STSD has a community volunteer program which is run by a paid volunteer coordinator. Volunteers are primarily parents and senior citizens, with resource support provided by local businesses. (Thirty-seven businesses are part of the STSD-business partnership.) The classroom teacher can go directly to the volunteer coordinator to request a volunteer for a student who is having difficulty. This is a very informal process. There is also a *cadet teaching program*, where high school students go into the elementary schools to assist students having academic difficulty. Such assistance can be arranged at the request of the classroom teacher. Many students identified by the Chapter I/Title I Program come to a before-school program called *Early Birds*. These students get support before the regular school day begins, without being pulled out of the classroom. A "push-in" Chapter I/Title I program is also provided during the school day.

A team approach is used at the middle school to address student needs. The teams consist of both special and general education staff. Also, at the middle and high schools there are academic assistance programs held after school at least twice a week; late bus transportation is provided. Academic assistance is for both students who are classified and not classified as disabled. Last year an *alternative education program* was started for middle and high school students who need small classes and structure to manage their behavior. This program is not a special education service.

In recent years, STSD has made a concerted effort to increase the number of staff from minority racial/ethnic groups. Currently, about 10 percent of their professional staff is from a minority racial/ethnic group. The school district has a recruitment policy and goals to support this effort. A considerable amount of money is spent on advertising for vacant positions in urban areas where there is likely to be a diverse applicant pool, and transportation costs are covered for minority applicants coming to the district for interviews. STSD also works closely with minority recruiting centers at a variety of colleges and universities. Applicants are clearly informed about the composition of the student body and the need to feel comfortable with diverse student needs. The applicant is asked about his/her experience with diverse populations and expected to do a demonstration teaching lesson. This thorough interview process makes it possible to hire qualified staff who are not clones of each other. In March of the first year of hire, new staff meet with administrators regarding their employment in STSD, and there is a two-way exchange of information, as part of a comprehensive *New Teacher Induction Program*.

STSD uses a program called Teacher Expectation Student Achievement (TESA). This program was developed in California to address the needs of unsuccessful students from minority ethnic and racial groups. About half the teachers in the district have had TESA training, which involves role playing and other techniques to acquaint teachers with strategies to encourage students who are struggling in school (e.g., equitable distribution of response opportunities, positive reinforcement).

STSD has four well-respected practitioners who are also competent trainers, according to the superintendent. These individuals conduct training for the district in the area of racial/ethnic sensitivity. This training is built into the staff development plan for the district on a periodic basis. STSD has found that using "insiders" for training is effective because these trainers know the school district and community well. There is rarely a problem with the training being too basic or patronizing when it is conducted by an "insider." STSD has also found that training sessions on racial/ethnic sensitivity get higher ratings if they are done in small groups (school or grade level). To supplement training, STSD is accumulating print material (e.g., books, teaching guides) on the topic of serving students with diverse needs and racial/ethnic sensitivity. A resource list is being compiled of all such materials, including the location of each resource in the school district libraries.

High school students have been members of task forces and advisory committees over the years on topics related to disproportionality. However, in order to give students an opportunity for more direct input on the topic of cultural/ethnic awareness and sensitivity, the superintendent met with a group of high school students on Sunday afternoons during the 1993-94 school year. Their feedback on these subjects has been incorporated into planning related to disproportionality.

## Challenges School Districts Face Addressing Disproportionality

Implementing strategies to address the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services has presented a variety of challenges for the school districts involved in this case study examination. Since many of the challenges facing the school districts were similar, the following section will be a discussion of challenges described by interviewees in two or more of the districts.

The challenge most often mentioned by interviewees from the school districts was that of having to break *old habits* of veteran staff. For two decades teachers have been referring students for special education services who exhibit academic or behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Once the referral has been made, assessment teams conduct evaluations, and typically these students are classified as disabled and special education services begun. Even when school districts have pre-referral intervention initiatives in place, including support systems for teachers, some staff are slow to embrace new procedures, especially when the *old ways* worked well for them in the past. In addition, if referral for special education services results in the removal of disruptive or hard-to-teach students from the classroom for all or part of the day, this is a great incentive for some teachers to continue to refer. Several interviewees summed up this challenge in three words, "Change is hard!"

Reorganizing and reorienting schools to support students in different and diverse ways is also a major challenge for school districts. School district officials know that in order to address disproportionality, they must use fiscal and human resources in novel ways, facilitate collaboration between general and special educators (e.g., consultation, team teaching), and create support services for students (and teachers) rather than refer them to special education, Such changes, however, necessitate massive upheaval in the typical school system bureaucracy.

Many interviewees were quick to point out that the students in their districts from minority racial/ethnic groups were more likely to live in families which need non-educational support services (e.g., housing subsidies, health care, drug/alcohol counseling) than majority students. Students who do not have their basic needs met (e.g., food, shelter, safety) are much less likely to make expected educational progress. School district representatives reported that accessing community services is often easier once the student is receiving special education services because special education teams are more likely to have experience with interagency coordination. Supporting students (and families) with multiple needs necessitates effective interagency coordination, which is a challenge in many school districts. Sometimes the lack of community resources leaves special education as the only option.

Representatives from half of the school districts indicated that the lack of cultural/ethnic sensitivity on the part of school staff is a challenge in the face of increasing student diversity. Educators, just like the public at large, hold strong stereotypes about students from racial/ethnic backgrounds different than theirs, and some of these stereotypes create a less than positive educational environment. Limited cultural/ethnic sensitivity may be the result of limited experience with diverse student populations or may be due to the fact that many educators do not live in the communities in which they work. When educators are not part of their workplace community, they may have less of an understanding of the students and their families. School districts reported that recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff that represents the diversity of their student population is a great challenge in and of itself.

Two other challenges described by school district representatives relate to the greater community of which the school is a part--families, churches, synagogues, business, etc. The communities are often not ready to support the major changes necessary to implement strategies that address disproportionality, particularly if the changes necessitate increased funds or shifting funds from popular school activities (e.g., sports). Communities often support the *status quo*. One interviewee said that community members have told him, "What was good for me is good for my children." Also, the community may not understand how providing extra educational services for students struggling in the classroom could be harmful or unfair, regardless of the students' racial/ethnic background. The challenge is to inform community members of the need to use new and varied educational strategies with our increasingly diverse student body.

The second community-related challenge for schools is that of getting parents, guardians, and families from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds involved in the school. In spite of the increasing diversity of our student population, our schools still tend to be very White and middle class in orientation. Several interviewees noted that expecting parents to come to a school meeting at a designated date, time and place is a concept alien to some cultures. And there are parents who do not feel comfortable coming to school to discuss educational techniques, goals and progress. However, school district officials know that in order to support the educational progress of students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, families must be involved, if only to provide valuable insight into the multiple dimensions of that student.

## Summary of Recurring Themes

*On site interviews with 28 educators in three states and eight school districts on the topic of addressing the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services revealed a number of recurring themes. These themes are presented below. The order of presentation does not represent the frequency that the topic was discussed by interviewees, nor does it reflect a prioritization on the part of the author.*

It is critical to recruit and retain a school staff (including administrators, teachers, counselors, etc.) that is trained to work with a culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse student population and is enthusiastic about working with such a population. Special efforts should be made to recruit and retain a school staff that reflects the diversity of the student population and community. Some of the strategies that states and school districts are using to attract and keep such a workforce include recruiting at colleges and universities with a diverse student body, sending local minority paraprofessionals to training programs, using distance learning to train local minority persons who know the community well, setting up mentoring programs and other support systems to encourage qualified staff to stay in the school district, offering attractive salary packages, stating explicitly the goal for a diverse workforce that is trained to teach students from many racial/ethnic backgrounds, and asking about qualifications related to that goal when interviewing applicants.

Along with recruiting and retaining a qualified school staff comes the responsibility for providing on-going professional development opportunities for all school personnel in the areas of positive classroom management, identifying learning strengths, effective instructional practices for diverse learners, non-biased assessment, educational equity, and the richness of cultural/racial/ethnic diversity. In order for school personnel to feel competent working with an increasingly diverse student population and to reduce referral for special education services, on-going support must be provided. State and district representatives indicated that such comprehensive training must be part of a total reform package, and on-going support and follow-up training must be provided after the initial training sessions (one-shot training does not work). In some districts, community members effectively provide training, on-going support, and consultation regarding racial/ethnic/cultural issues.

General and special educators must embrace all students who should be attending the local school, including those with disabilities, and work together to provide a successful learning environment for all those students. States and school districts are promoting this philosophy by establishing school-based teams designed to *brainstorm* and *trouble-shoot* when a student manifests academic or behavioral difficulties. The intent of establishing such teams, which are referred to by various names (e.g., instructional support teams, building-based support teams, local screening committee), is to build (team) support within the school and tap the expertise and perspectives of a variety of local educators--to erase the notion that the classroom teacher is a solo practitioner.

School-based teams are charged with identifying alternative instructional and behavioral strategies for the student under discussion. Some interviewees were careful to point out that use of the such teams should not be considered a perfunctory step before referral for special education services. This theme dovetails with the previous one in that special and general educators must be trained together and function as equals in order to educate students who present a multitude of learning strengths and needs. Peer support, team teaching, and demonstration teaching has been used in some school districts to reinforce the policy that each student is the responsibility of the whole school. Also, early childhood programs (not special education)--pre-kindergarten or early elementary--were mentioned by some districts as part of a total school effort to reach out to students at risk for learning difficulties.

Parent/family input should be solicited and incorporated early in the child's school experience and maintained throughout the middle and high school years. Parent/family involvement should not be initiated for the first time when problems emerge. District representatives talked about the importance of giving parents/families and teachers access to each other at mutually convenient times so that they can support each other's efforts. School staff must adopt a broad definition of parent/family involvement. For example, it may be more comfortable for some parents/families to provide input in an informal manner (e.g., telephone, drop-in) rather than during a formal meeting. Some districts are using community liaisons (paraprofessionals) to reach out to racially/ethnically diverse families.

Providing jargon-free information to parents/families on how schools are reaching out to diverse learners is also important. Parents/families must know that every student is not expected to be the same and that special education is not the only way a student can get support at school. Families also need access to information (e.g., brochures, directories) about the array of services available in the community to support students and families, and schools may be in the best situation to disseminate such information.

In spite of the variety of state and local initiatives directed at more proactive strategies to address disproportionality, procedures are also in place to monitor the referral and evaluation/assessment process. Such monitoring is deemed necessary, according to state and district representatives, because data and experience indicate that most students referred for special education services are classified as disabled and provided such services. The most common monitoring strategy is the multiracial/ethnic committee or team that reviews evaluation/assessment data and/or placement decisions for students from minority racial/ethnic groups. Sometimes, there is a single person from a minority racial/ethnic group that reviews these decisions. The committees or individuals are charged with providing a racially/ethnically-sensitive perspective on assessment and/or placement issues. Decisions are typically postponed until an appropriate multiracial/ethnic committee is able to convene or a person identified.

Addressing disproportionality does not appear to be a "grass roots" issue in many communities or states. This may be the result of a lack of information about the issue or a lack of concern about providing individualized special educational services to students, including those from minority racial/ethnic groups, who are experiencing difficulty in school. School districts are exploring ways to inform the community about efforts to address disproportionality in the context of addressing the needs of a student population that is diverse in terms of racial/ethnic background as well as learning strengths and challenges. Community members and businesses are being included on policy-making and planning committees in a attempt to enhance community understanding of the impact of polices and procedures, and improve community linkages. Interviewees cautioned districts not to assign blame and to have a clear understanding of data before releasing it to the public.

Although, states and districts were not concentrating their efforts only on data collection and analysis, special education data, disaggregated by race/ethnic group, is necessary in order to understand the extent and breadth of disproportionality and focus strategies. Policies/procedures regarding how students are counted (e.g., students identified outside of state vs. inside the district) should be clarified and applied consistently. School officials and building principals should be trained to use data for decision-making and program improvement. Ultimately, the goal should be to maximize each and every student's educational potential, regardless of racial/ethnic background.

This document represents a unique effort to examine the steps taken by states and school districts to address the disproportionate number of students from minority racial/ethnic groups receiving special education services. The themes discussed above summarize the rich qualitative data collected from educators during extensive in-person interviews. It is the hope of Project FORUM that this document will promote dialogue and stimulate multi-faceted development of positive proactive approaches to a complex and long-standing educational challenge.

## References

Harry, B. (1994). *The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Theories and recommendations*. Alexandria, VA: Project FORUM at The National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

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# Appendix A

## Rating of State-Level Initiatives

# Rating of State-Level Initiatives to Address the Disproportionate Number of Students From Minority Ethnic/Racial Groups Receiving Special Education Services

## Background and Methodology

In the spring and summer of 1995, Project FORUM at NASDSE conducted three case studies on state and district-level initiatives to address the disproportionate number of students from minority ethnic/racial groups receiving special education services. Preparation for this activity and selection of the case study states involved reviewing the initiatives of eleven states and talking with many people about this topic. Although only three states were selected for case study, Project FORUM created a three-tiered rating system to summarize the information obtained from a larger number of states. The following rating system was designed to reflect state-level initiatives to address disproportionality:

1 = **Isolated and unconnected initiatives** around the state generated by local concern or local court orders; no coordinated efforts from the state education agency

2 = **Planning and stakeholder involvement** taking place at the state level; no current statewide data collection or coordinated efforts to correct disproportionality

3 = **State-level initiatives** to collect data and support local efforts to correct disproportionality

Each state's rating was confirmed with the state director of special education or a designee. No supporting documents were requested.

## Summary

Eight of the eleven states contacted for information in 1995 had state-level initiatives currently in place to collect data and support local efforts to address disproportionality. In addition, one state was engaged in state-level planning to address this issue which included stakeholder involvement. Two states identified isolated and unconnnected initiatives around the state. The ratings assigned to each of the eleven states are presented in Table 1.

This state-rating activity provides the field with information on the type of state-level initiatives to address disproportionality and the extent to which it is occuring. For specific information on state-level initiatives to address disproportionality, please contact the persons identified in Table 2.

## Table 1
## Rating of State-Level Initiatives to Address Disproportionality

| State | Rating |
|---|---|
| Alabama | 3 |
| California | 3 |
| Hawaii | 3 |
| Iowa | 1 |
| Illinois | 3 |
| Indiana | 3 |
| Massachusetts | 1* |
| Michigan | 3 |
| New Jersey | 3 |
| Rhode Island | 2 |
| Texas | 3 |

* Information from prior initiatives is available.

1 = **Isolated and unconnected initiatives** around the state generated by local concern or local court orders; no coordinated efforts from the state education agency

2 = **Planning and stakeholder involvement** taking place at the state level; no current statewide data collection or coordinated efforts to correct disproportionality

3 = **State-level initiatives** to collect data and support local efforts to correct disproportionality

## Table 2
## Contact Person at State Education Agency Regarding State-Level Initiatives to Address Disproportionality

| State | Contact Person |
|---|---|
| Alabama | Emily Graham<br>Coordinator of Administrative Support<br>Division of Special Education Services<br>(334) 242-8114 |
| California | Betty J. Hernandez, Special Education Consultant<br>Secondary & Personnel Development Unit<br>Special Education Division<br>(916) 327-4215 |
| Hawaii | Robert Campbell, Acting Administrator<br>Special Education Section<br>(808) 733-4990 |
| Iowa | Jeananne Hagen, Acting Chief<br>Bureau of Special Education<br>(515) 281-3176 |
| Illinois | Gail Lieberman, Senior Policy Advisor<br>Center on Policy, Planning & Resource Management<br>(217) 782-6601 |
| Indiana | Hank Binder, Coordinator<br>Federal Projects<br>Division of Special Education<br>(317) 232-0570 |
| Massachusetts | Marcia Mittnacht, Executive Director<br>Educational Improvement<br>Department of Education<br>(617) 388-3300 |
| Michigan | Ted Beck, Supervisor<br>Training, Curriculum & Approvals<br>(517) 373-6325 |
| New Jersey | Barbara Gantwerk, Director<br>Office of Special Education Programs<br>(609) 633-6833 |
| Rhode Island | Robert Pryhoda, Coordinator<br>Special Education Programs<br>(401) 277-3505 |
| Texas | Forrest Novy, Education Specialist<br>Special Education Unit<br>(512) 463-9414 |

## Appendix B

Data Collection Guideline for States
Data Collection Guideline for School Districts

## Data Collection Guideline for States

1. How does your state determine disproportionality?

   - Categories for race/ethnicity
   - Criterion for determining disproportionality
   - Tracking procedures

2. What was the impetus for addressing this issue in your state?

   - Court order
   - Media/press
   - Advocacy groups
   - SEA interest/concern
   - Legislative initiative

3. Who are the stakeholders and how have they been involved?

   - Advocacy groups
   - Teachers
   - Administrators
   - Legislators

4. Describe the policies/directives/initiatives from the SEA

   - Monitoring the school districts
   - Strategies prior to referral
   - Strategies at the time of referral
   - Breadth of implementation
   - Length of implementation
   - Training
   - Evaluation
   - Reactions from community

5. Describe the roles/responsibilities of the school districts

   - Monitoring the schools
   - Development of local policies/directives/initiatives
   - Implementation of SEA initiatives
   - Training
   - Evaluation
   - Reactions from the community

6. Describe the roles/responsibilities of the local school

- Development of school-based policies/directives/initiatives
- Implementation of SEA and school district initiatives
- Training
- Evaluation
- Reactions from the community

7. What future plans does the state have to address the issue of disproportionality?

## Data Collection Guideline for School Districts

1. What is your total student population and the racial/ethnic make-up?

2. Who determines the student's race?

3. How many schools do you have in your district?

4. What is your total special education population and the racial/ethnic make-up?

5. How did you come to discover that your school district had a disproportionate number of students from racial/ethnic minority groups receiving special education services?

6. How did the community respond to this information?

7. Do you disaggregate data by school? If yes, how do you use those data?

8. How did the school personnel respond to this information?

9. Describe the strategies your district has implemented or is implementing to address disproportionality.

10. In which areas do you believe there was/is the greatest need for change?

    - Instructional practices/prereferral strategies
    - Referral practices
    - Evaluation/assessment report
    - Placement and programming

11. How do you provide training and support to schools?

12. What future plans does your district have to address this issue?

## Appendix C

### Conway Public Schools, Arkansas
### Minority Overrepresentation Plan-Special Education

## CONWAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
## MINORITY OVERREPRESENTATION PLAN - SPECIAL EDUCATION
## 1994-95

1. Conduct bi-racial staffings twice monthly for minority students referred as possibly being in need of special education.
2. Review overrepresentation data with special education personnel and district administrators.
3. Compile and disseminate school and district data regarding overrepresentation and consult with building level personnel regarding individual school reports.
4. Increase awareness of pre-referral intervention through staff development and require a list of interventions attempted with the success rate of each prior to referral of individual children.
5. Update assessment instruments to include latest versions of each including those that are most nearly culturally non-biased.
6. Provide information to staff members regarding referral to supplemental instructional programs other than special education such as Chapter 1 and Compensatory Education.
7. Ensure that students who are at-risk for school failure have equal access to other compensatory education programs such as the K-3 Summer School Initiative.
8. Work with individual schools to improve parent involvement.
9. Implement social skills training programs especially at the primary level.
10. Conduct staff development in the areas of child abuse/neglect and medical issues and needs.
11. Obtain information from other school districts that have shown improvement in the area of overrepresentation.
12. Conduct staff development activities in the area of cultural diversity and the needs of minority students.
13. Work with individual schools during the COE process to focus on correlates which might improve educational opportunities for at-risk children and youth.

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## Appendix D

Kennett Consolidated School District, Pennsylvania Action Plan

## I. REGULAR EDUCATION

Describe how the school district considers the following areas when working with the minority students identified by PDE as under/over represented:

A. **Exposure to Curriculum**: Students in grades K-12 are expected to participate in the outlined curriculum that has been developed for the Kennett Consolidated School District. The curriculum is designed to meet a broad range of student needs. This curriculum takes into account the differences in culture and backgrounds of all students which are recognized in the selection of literature, and activities as we modify and create new programs to reflect the perspectives of those students we teach daily. It is based on a continuous learning model, where students can be placed based on their learning style and skill development. Modifications include:

B. **Students: Method of Presentation**: Students are provided assistance in the reading of text or questions. Text material can be read in class and also can be made available on tape where appropriate. Modifications are in place for students with I.E.P.s. Basic skills programs in reading and math are provided those students who meet the criteria. Continued work in the basic skills program in a small group setting allow for mastery of discrete skills in mathematics and reading/writing/spelling through continued practice and collaboration with the regular education teacher and parents.

**Students: Multi-media Approach:** Since students' learning styles require support to the direct lecture approach, attention is given to providing a variety of audio/visual materials to reinforce skills. Films from media, Chester County Intermediate Unit, County library, as well as videos, and software are previewed and used whenever possible.

C. **Evaluation of Instruction**: All manufacturer prepared tests will be used as instructional tools. The standard method of evaluation prescribed in the curriculum guide in addition to traditional pencil and paper tests, include oral tests, open book tests, strong emphasis on classroom participation and homework, hands-on project work. On-going opportunities are provided to teachers to conduct item analysis of student performance on the standardized IOWA test administered yearly to evaluate student progress from year to year in the planning of instruction. Staff development is based on the specific needs within buildings as identified by administration and teaching staff resulting from an analysis of student performance. Teacher prepared tests reflect I.E.P requirements.

D. **Teachers:** Teachers are selected based on their ability to work effectively with a diverse population and to motivate

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students to excellence. Careful interviews are conducted to ensure an understanding and sensitivity towards the district student population. Once selected, teachers meet monthly for training in our *Teacher Induction Program* which addresses specific teaching skills and competencies as well as interventions, strategies and programs available prior to possible special education identification and placement. Weekly team meetings to address the needs of students and instructional methodologies provide on-going inservice to all staff.

E. **Instruction: Emphasis on Study Skills:** In addition to content objectives, stronger emphasis is placed on study skills, such as notetaking, outlining, report writing, time management, organizational skills, test taking skills, written and oral reporting, homework completion.

F. **Parents and Community:** Minority parents are involved at the building level through individual parent/teacher/principal conferences, Grade Level Team meetings (Middle School), and PTO programs designed to help parents work with their students. *Even Start*, a program designed to support preschool children (primarily Latino and African American) is designed to teach young children readiness skills. Parental involvement is required in the teaching learning process. Parental participation is required. Packets are routinely developed and sent home as a part of the program to provide opportunities for children to extend in-school learning into the home. This program has a summer component for continued instruction for children and training for parents throughout the school year.

**Level of Presentation:** It is assumed that students learn at different rates and within all classrooms, demonstrate various levels of functioning within the subskills of the Reading/Language Arts Program. Though our program presents skills and materials at a specific grade level, we recognize that students develop these skills on a continuum basis. Therefore, the selection of an instructional level is based on a diagnostic process that provides for constant rewiew of skill acquisition and appropriate instructional decision making. The IST teacher works closely with classrooms teachers to provide them with relevant information to improve their teaching skills in working with identified students.

## II. PRE-REFERRAL

### A. How the school district takes into consideration the following:

**Consideration of Language and Culture**: Kennett Consolidated Schools recognize the opportunities inherent within our cultural diversity. Much emphasis is placed on enriching our schools through multicultural educational opportunities.

Four basic goals have been stressed in Administrative meetings with suggestions and methods to articulate throughout the buildings. These goals follow:

1. **Reduction of ability grouping and provisions for greater inclusion for all students.**

Actions: Heterogeneous grouping has been instituted K-5, allowing for underrepresented populations to access higher level instruction and more diverse role models. Grouping patterns at the middle school have been designated as a target for change in the 1994-95 school year.

2. **Develop cultural awareness among students and teachers**

Actions: Videos have been previewed and purchased for use within our curriculum to broaden teacher and student understanding of the Latino culture. Special emphasis is placed on incorporating the contributions of African American and Latino cultures into the curriculum, specifically, literature and social studies programs.

3. **Emphasize multiculturalism within the curriculum and instructional program.**

Actions: The Black Experience has been integrated into the social studies thematic units developed K-5 this summer as a means of bringing greater authenticity to the program.

4. **Create opportunities for community involvement**

Actions: We held a meeting in the fall with over 100 Latino parents to discuss our programs and to obtain input an recommendations from parents regarding their children's participation in our programs. Representation from PDE participated in an effort to generate programs and funding to increase the number of specialized programs for ESL students. We continue our dialogue with parents and advocates for the Latino Community.

We have a **Unity Day** in Kennett Square, which extends our efforts within the school and allows all groups (African American, Latino, Asian, Caucasian) to come together to celebrate their unique foods, customs, and build community-wide networks, understanding and mutual respect as we celebrate cultural diversity.

**Community Resource Committee:** The district has been involved in working with a Community/School committee on cross-cultural communication in identifying problems and needs and strategies for addressing these concerns across a broad range of communites.

**Mental Health Providers Services Delivery:** The district has lobbyed for bilingual and bicultural counselors for the minority communities who have had limited access to programs and services relative to their specific language and cultual needs. This publically funded service will be operational in Kennet for the coming year.

All parents who have specific concerns or complaints regarding their child's program are invited in to discuss the issues and arrive at agreeable solutions to placement and identification issues.

**Collaborative consultation/modifications/parental involvement:**

1. Weekly team meetings to discuss student's needs involve parents, ESL staff, guiiidance, administration and others as appropriate.

2. Determination of interventions through the guidance department and follow-up occur routinely.

3. Support Teachers, ESL teacher are involved to assist students in areas of academic need in both pull-out and in the use of in-class support strategies.

## B. Support services available for minority students:

The KCSD provides daily instructional support for all referred students K-12. Elementary school students K-6 are involved in the formal structure of the IST process. The IS Teacher meets with the requesting teacher and obtains a full description of the presenting problem. A student profile is developed which includes a description of the child's academic and behavioral strengths and assets, needs as well as a listing of the interventions tried and their results. The IS Teacher offers suggestions for immediate strategies to be tried as a means of immediately assisting the child and the teacher. The IS Teacher then completes three or more CBA interventions in reading and math related directly to the curriculum and then analyzes the resulting data as a basis for developing a written action plan developed collaboratively with staff and administration to promote the child's progress within the regular classroom. Proactive measures are taken to provide academic instruction during the summer for those students who are experiencing academic difficulty during the year.

Middle school students have the opportunity to work with a support teacher two periods per week. This teacher confers with teachers and works directly with students who are experiencing academic difficulty. Students receive help from regular classroom teachers daily as needs are determined. Weekly grade level team meetings include the learning support, guidance, administration and parents working collaborative to assess and address student academic and social/behavioral needs.

At the high school level, students are involved in scheduled tutorials to provide academic and motivational support. Middle and high school teachers were provided with an inservice to assist them in working with underrepresented populations, (African Americans, Latino, female students) who may have greater potentialities in math and science than recognized.

The science curriculum committee has been exposed to the research on these underrepresented groups and the resulting decisions on utilization of a hands-on, inquiry approach to teaching science is reflected in our elementary science pilot for the 1994-95 school year.

C./D. N/A FOR THIS REPORT'S REQUIREMENTS

## III. MULTIDISCIPLINARY EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

### A. Procedures utilized when conducting an Instructional/Ecological evaluation for African-American students.

Assessment for Instructional Planning: All students receive IST intervention and supports prior to referral and MDE. Assessment of African American students begins with three fundamental questions to be answered:

(1) Has the student had the opportunity to learn the required tasks and behaviors.
(2) Have the appropriate academic and behavioral supports been in place to aid the student's success experience?
(3) If evaluation is warranted, have I selected materials and processes free from cultural bias.

The following sequence is utilized to obtain and investigate information relevant to the student's suspected exceptionality. These include:

a. Academic functioning
b. Adaptive behavior
c. Social Behavior

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d. Learning problems
e. Learning strengths
f. Educational needs and results of IST interventions
g. Information from parents received as to whether they view their child as exceptional

**The evaluation includes:**

a. Appropriate due process procedures/protection
b. Information from parents
c. For learning support, instructional evaluation (acquisition and retention)
d. For life skills support, ecological/life skills evaluation (This assessment includes an analysis of the instructional needs within priority environments (school, community and home) in which the student will need to participate and meet success.

e. **A formal report** is written specifying the outcome of the MDE. It provides information of the student's educational needs/strengths, based upon current levels of performance; interpretation of assessment results; observations in classroom and other relevant settings. Recommendations are prepared stating whether the student is exceptional; the basis for the recommendations and the educational program recommended whether the student is or is not exceptional. Names of MDT members with signatures of agreement or disagreement, with the conclusion are included.

f. **Ecological/Life Skills Assessment:** For students who are low functioning or multihandicapped, an evaluation to determine his/her ability to perform the skills and activities necessary to participate in the instructional environment is completed.

### B. Describe the involvement of ESL/Bilingual staff during the MDE process.

ESL/Bilingual,Bicultural evaluators are used for the pschoeducational and ecological assessments with limited English speaking students and parents. These specially trained staff, teachers and administrators are involved from the beginning of the educational experience in the district with students who are limited English speaking, migrant or emerging English speaking students.

### C. Describe the involvement of minority parents during the MDE process.

Parents are involved at the beginning of the IST process and continue to be involved until final determination of eligibility is made. A bilingual, bicultural member of the team is included to interpret and assist parents in understanding and participating in the process.

### D. Describe the involvement of staff sensitive to the culture and language of the student.

Through pre-referral strategies, specifically, the IST and student assistance interventions, staff are provided a broad range of opportunities to understand the specific needs of students and how they can assist them in the instructional and social skills development process. Every effort is made to modify and adapt instruction to meet the instructional an programmatic needs of the student in the current placement before he/she is referred. Teachers, parent advocates and administrators familiar with the culture and needs of the student work collaboratively to ensure sensitivity and broading options for working with students.

### E. Describe procedures to administer tests and evaluation material in the native language or preferred mode of communication of the students.

Bilingual personnel, trained in the native language of the student are part of the screening, evaluation and I.E.P. process.

## IV. INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

### A. Describe how the district addresses the language and cultural needs in each I.E.P.

At the outset, the I.E.P. determines that the student's disability is not related to his/her limited English proficiency. There is statement of the present levels of performance in the native language and in English. The amount of time the student will spend in a regular, bilingual, special education setting is identified in the I.E.P. Strategies and approached are designed to address not only the handicapping condition, but also the student's language, culture and other background issues and characteristics identified in the I.E.P.

### B. Describe exit criteria procedures for minority students.

Exit criteria are specific to individual needs of the students. Students are considered for reentry full time into the regular class program when they can progress adequately in regular education without the support of an instructional aide and or special education teacher.

The exit criteria for students identified for special education is (1) passing performance in regular education programs following a transition period where special education support is gradually weaned away and no longer required. (2) Posttest in reading and mathematics indicating that the student is no greater that 2 years below grade level and can handle the regular academic program requirements successfully with minimum modifications.

## C. Describe how support services available for students are sensitive to their language and cultural needs.

All support services for ESL students focus on the language-skills development for all English-as-a second-language (ESL) students. Parent/teacher conferences focus on transferring English-language learning to the home environment. The district has purchased materials and library resources that accommodate ESL students. We also provide multi-level instruction that is designed to gradually move ESL students toward the goal of high achievement in their mainstream classes. The philosophy of the district is based on the belief that all students can learn and reach success. Teachers are trained to work with students as individuals and to seek success for each based on their unique skills, abilities and needs. Students work in small groups and are encouraged to feel confident in their abilities. Materials selected are relevant and reflect a multicultural orientation. Teachers trained in ESL instruction translate lessons and instructions and assist in the assessment of ESL students.

## D. Describe how the specially designed instruction is developed to assure all needs are met, including cultural and language needs.

The I.E.P. is based on the results of non-biased assessments which focus on the strengths to be built upon as well as the needs identified from the evaluations. Evaluations are always done in the native language of the child. All parties participating in the evaluation, (including the ESL teacher, speech specialist, psychologist, parents, bilingual evaluator) administrator, regular and special education teachers are involved in determining appropriate goals and objectives to meet the educational needs of the child. They mutually determine the roles of each in the remediation process.

## E. Describe the involvement of minority parents and other staff sensitive to the cultural an language needs of identified students.

Minority parents are involved at the building level through individual parent/teacher/principal conferences, PTO programs designed to help parents work with their students. *Even Start*, a program designed to support preschool children (primarily Latino and African American) is designed to teach young children readiness skills. Parental involvement is required in the teaching learning process. Parental participation is required. Packets are routinely developed and sent home as a part of the program to provide opportunities for children to extend in-school learning into the home. This program has a summer component for continued instruction for children and training for parents throughout the school year.

### F. **Describe procedures for inclusion of the identified minority students in regular education.**

All students are mainstreamed for the major portion of their school day, beginning and ending their day with regular education students. Students are provided academic support in both regular and pull-out settings with both regular and special education teachers planning together. The Least Restrictive Environment is considered to be the primary decision to be made for all students. This requirement is always met will full participation by parents, guidance, regular and special teachers and administration.

### G. **Describe the range of options for level and location of services for identified students.**

Our district programs accommodate all reading and language levels within our Learning Support (itinerant, resource, part-time) and Speech and Language Support programs. These programs are deliverd within the regular class for a portion or the entire day. We provide instructional support by special education personnel in both in-class and pull-out programs. Modifications are also made within regular classroom instructional programs according to the I.E.P and delivered by regular classroom teachers. All students are assigned to their home school for services based on the needed level of intervention, and the most appropriate grouping to meet the student's individual needs. These range of options are always considered prior to student assignment to programs out of their home school district.

### H. **Describe how the I.E.P. Team considers the following information during the I.E.P. process:**

Through screening and involvement of the ESL, Speech Language Specialist, IST, parents and administration, a determination is made early as to whether the student's academic/ and or behavioral difficulties are related to language, cultural differences and/or the opportunity to learn. Once referred for determination of exceptionality,

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the I.E.P. team meets and the data and information presented utilized are based on a Multidisciplinary evaluation report that is free from racial and cultural bias. This process always addresses student academic skills, and the basic academic content that the student is expected to learn. Rates of acquisition and retention are measured and student instructional support need levels are determined. All student evaluations are conducted in the native language. A statement of present levels of performance are always provided in the native language and in English.

The I.E.P. incorporates program modifications that take into account students linguistic and cultural needs as materials reflect a broad range of student experiences, models and activities to promote such sensitivity; identifies language of instruction; the amount of time the student will spend in regular, bilingual or special education; states the language in which related services will be provided; specific strategies and approaches are also incorporated. Background information addresses student's language, culture and characteristics.

Notices, letters and reports are written in the native language of the parents an in English. All communications are written in a manner easily understood by parents.

## V. RE-EVALUATION

### A. Describe how the district emphasizes data driven procedures that look at exit criteria during the re-evaluation process.

The MDE team prepares a comprehensive reevaluation report that looks at those instructional activities in which the student has met success and areas of continued specialized instruction, based on pre and post testing, observation, student products and teacher recommendation. An important criteria is that the student must be comfortable and progress working with the instructional program in a regular classroom. Each student is assessed with the goal of return to full time/and or greater involvement in regular education programs.

### B. Provide the percentage of identified minority students that exit the program on a yearly basis.

Between 1992 and 1994, 36% of identified minority students have exited the program; 1992= 6/40 students or 15%; 1993= 5/33 students, or 15%; 1994= 2/28 students, or 7%.

## VI. PLACEMENT/PROGRAMS

A. The percentage of minority students that are currently mainstreamed in regular education programs is 76%.

B. For school year 1993-94, 0% were moved to more restrictive environments.

C. The district returned two African American students attending CDC to their home district high school for the 1993-94 school year. Two additional African American students will return to the high school with mainstreaming for the 1994-95 school year. The goal is to bring students back to their home school as quickly as possible and to provide programs to foster success.

D. All staff hired to teach exceptional students are fully certified and participate in the teacher induction program which has a special education component. ESL, fully trained and certified support students in need of bilingual and or ESL instruction and are provided the additional support of the district ESL and or Migrant program offerings.

## VII. General Information

A. Number African-American:
 (a) administrators = 1;
 (b) teachers =8;
 (c) teacher aides =1;
 (d) other school personnel =18

B. Number Latino:
 (a) administrators = 0
 (b) teachers = 2
 (c) teacher aides =1
 (d) other school personnel = 2

C. Number of bilingual/bicultural:
 (a) administrators=0
 (b) teachers= 2;
 (c) teacher aides =1;
 (d) other Personnel=2

## Appendix E

Susquehanna Township School District, Pennsylvania
Strategic Plan - Goal #71

## GOAL #7: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PLAN TO CULTIVATE SENSITIVITY TO THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE POPULATION

### PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY

Pamela and Iris Tiedt discuss the need to address the diversity that includes young and old, male and female, the physically able and disabled, as well as those who can be grouped by language, national origin, or religious belief as they write:

> The United States houses a diverse complex of cultures... Over the life of this country, there have been persistent conflicts among peoples in getting along together, with resulting negative effects stemming from prejudice and discriminatory attitudes toward specific groups within our country.
>
> Learning to get along with the people of diverse backgrounds, needs, and expectations who make up our American culture requires commitment...(Educators) have a significant role to play in guiding children at all levels to recognize and respect diversity as they interact with other young people...(Tiedt and Tiedt, 1985:1)

The Goal #7 Action Team approached its task from the belief that all students should be acknowledged, valued, and respected. Further, all students in Susquehanna Township should have the opportunity to the explore differences among people, experience and understand diversity, and work toward providing equity for all people. To this end, the Action Plan developed by this committee is designed to:

1. help children develop positive gender, racial, cultural, class, and individual identities and to recognize and accept their membership in many different groups.
2. enable children to see themselves as part of the larger society; to empathize, relate, and identify with individuals from other groups.
3. foster respect and appreciation for people of different racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and cultural backgrounds.
4. encourage in young children's earliest social relationships an openness and interest in others, a willingness to include others, and a desire to work cooperatively.

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5. promote the development of realistic awareness of contemporary society, a sense of social responsibility, and an active concern that extends beyond one's immediate family or group.

6. create a school environment that supports the philosophy of Goal #7 of the Strategic Plan.

## SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

1. Establish a Task Force to oversee the implementation of Goal 7 of the Susquehanna Township School District Strategic Plan.

2. Establish an ongoing educational program for all district personnel and students to develop knowledge of and sensitivity to diversity.

3. Communicate the district's philosophy on diversity to the parents and community and solicit their support.

4. Integrate activities and materials into the K-12 curriculum which represent the experiences and accomplishments of the world's diverse population.

5. Facilitate the assimilation of new students into the diverse environment of Susquehanna Township School District.

6. Periodically review and update school district policies relative to our diverse population, i.e., "minority recruitment," "religious activities, practices and observances."

7. Establish an emergency plan to deal with situations that could potentially be volatile because of the cultural diversity of our school district.

8. Develop programs that encourage minority students to pursue careers in which they are under-represented.

## DEFINITIONS

**Minority**: one who has typically been discriminated against because of such characteristics as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability.

**Diversity**: the differences that exist among members of our society relative to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and disability.

**Sensitivity**: awareness of the differences that exist among people in a diverse community and the feelings that these differences may evoke.

**OBJECTIVE #1:** Establish a Task Force to oversee the implementation of Goal 7 of the Susquehanna Township School District Strategic Plan.

ACTION PLAN

1. Select a chairperson for the Task Force.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent

   STARTING DATE: July, 1995

2. Outline the specific charge that will guide the work of and establish time lines for the Task Force.

   ASSIGNED TO:

   Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Goal #7 Task Force Chairperson

   STARTING DATE: August, 1995

3. Select Task Force members that reflect the school district's diversity. The Task Force should include:

   4 - teachers (elementary, middle school, high school)

   2 - secondary students (1 high school; 1 middle school

   3 - parents (elementary and secondary)

   1 - community representative

   1 - representative from the business community

   1 - administrator

   1 - counselor

   1 - Assistant to the Superintendent

   * The Superintendent shall serve as an ex officio member of the Task Force

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Goal #7 Task Force Chairperson

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STARTING DATE: November, 1995

**OBJECTIVE #2:** Establish an ongoing education program for all district personnel and students to develop knowledge of and sensitivity to diversity.

ACTION PLAN

1. Familiarize the staff with the Action Plan for Goal 7 of the Strategic Plan and emphasize its importance.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force Chairperson

   STARTING DATE: October, 1995

2. Act 178 Committee will include in its plan for professional development programs that address Goal #7 Objectives.

   ASSIGNED TO:
   Act 178 Committee
   Goal #7 Task Force
   PDE Division of School Equity
   HRC

   STARTING DATE: November, 1995

3. Facilitate the participation of classified staff in workshops/programs focusing on disabilities, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender.

   ASSIGNED TO:
   Goal #7 Task Force
   Business Manager
   Assistant to the Superintendent

   STARTING DATE: April, 1997

4. Provide the opportunity for all professional staff to receive TESA training and re-training.

   ASSIGNED TO:
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Act 178 Committee

   STARTING DATE: September, 1996

5. Provide opportunities for students to explore diversity through programs like REACH, The World of Difference, Americans All, etc.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
Assistant to the Superintendent
Building Principals
Building/Subject or grade level Committees (e.g., MS Restructuring Committee, Social Studies Committee)

STARTING DATE: September, 1996

6. Conduct district wide, simultaneous discussions involving all students and staff. With the help of a facilitator, groups made up of a cross section of our diverse population will explore pre-determined topics.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
Superintendent
Building Principals

STARTING DATE: March, 1997

7. Establish informal or extra-curricular discussion groups at the middle and high school levels.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
Building Principals
MS Advisory Committee
Guidance Counselors

STARTING DATE: September, 1997

8. Explore opportunities to network with other school districts to exchange information and ideas. In addition to seeking new avenues for collaboration, utilize existing cooperative initiatives like CPE, the New Baldwin Corridor, I.U. 15, Curriculum Advisory Council, etc. by communicating on a yearly basis our progress, needs, and concerns.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
Assistant to the Superintendent
PDE Division of School Equity
HRC

STARTING DATE: March, 1998

**OBJECTIVE #3:** Communicate the district's philosophy on diversity to parents and the community and solicit their support.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Inform the residents of Susquehanna Township of Strategic Planning Goal 7 and its Action Plan through the district newsletter.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent

   STARTING DATE: October, 1995; yearly updates

2. Provide parents with a synopsis of ongoing activities relating to Goal 7 through building newsletters and invite them to participate when appropriate.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Building principals
   Principal's Advisory Committee

   STARTING DATE: December, 1997

3. Compile a list of community resources (directory of organizations, businesses, museums, government agencies, resource people) that would be helpful to parents and community members in addressing concerns relating to the diversity of our school district.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Librarians
   Counselors

   STARTING DATE: November, 1998

**OBJECTIVE #4:** Integrate activities and materials into the K-12 curriculum which represent the experiences and accomplishments of the world's diverse population.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Acquire a collection of professional resource materials at each media center.

   ASSIGNED TO: Librarians
   Goal #7 Task Force
   District Reading Supervisor
   PDE Division of School Equity
   HRC

   STARTING DATE: October, 1997; update yearly

2. Provide high interest reading and multi-media materials for students at each media center.

   ASSIGNED TO: Librarians
   Goal #7 Task Force
   District Reading Supervisor
   PDE Division of School Equity
   HRC

   STARTING DATE: September, 1997

3. Compile a computerized list of available materials which will help integrate the K-12 curriculum.

   ASSIGNED TO: Librarians
   District Reading Supervisor

   STARTING DATE: December, 1997

4. Develop a rubric to evaluate instructional materials to determine if they reflect the diversity of the world's population. This checklist will be used by all subject area review committees involved in the selection of instructional materials.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
   District Reading Supervisor
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Grade level/Department Chairs
   Textbook Selection Committees

   STARTING DATE: November, 1997

5. Periodically review/update of the district's reading list to ensure inclusion of a diversity of authors and

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topics.

ASSIGNED TO: District Library Committee
District Reading Supervisor
Assistant to the Superintendent

STARTING DATE: February, 1997

6. Compile a suggested reading list for the staff.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
District Library Committee
Assistant to the Superintendent
PDE Division of School Equity
HRC

STARTING DATE: May, 1998

7. Develop interdisciplinary units K-12 that can be included in the curriculum.

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
District Multicultural Committee
Assistant to the Superintendent
PDE Division of School Equity
HRC

STARTING DATE: October, 1999

8. Establish a theme in the literature-based reading program at the primary and intermediate levels that addresses diversity.

ASSIGNED TO: District Reading Supervisor
Grade level/Reading Committee

STARTING DATE: September, 1996

9. Develop and coordinate activities to celebrate or commemorate the accomplishment and struggles of minority groups (e.g., Black History Month, the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Women's History Month, the Holocaust, etc.)

ASSIGNED TO:

District Multicultural Committee
PDE Division of School Equity
HRC

STARTING DATE: Elementary: September, 1995
Middle School: September, 1996
High School: September, 1997

10. Promote electives at the High School that explore our diverse society (e.g., Women's Studies, Black Studies, Multiculturalism, Comparative Religions, etc.)

ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
High School Guidance Counselors
Assistant to the Superintendent
High School Principals
Selected High School Teachers
Principal's Student Advisory Committee

STARTING DATE: September, 2000

11. Coordinate/evaluate the activities of this objective through Susquehanna Township School District's curriculum evaluation/monitoring plan.

ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
Assistant to the Superintendent
Curriculum Council

STARTING DATE: September, 1995

**OBJECTIVE #5:** Facilitate the assimilation of new students into the diverse environment of Susquehanna Township School District.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Develop an orientation program at each building that includes a component that addresses the diversity of our school district and assists the student's assimilation.

   ASSIGNED TO: Assistant to the Superintendent
   Building Principals
   Guidance Counselors

   STARTING DATE: May, 1997

2. As a part of each school's orientation process new students will:

   a. participate in a program designed to facilitate their assimilation into the diverse population at the Susquehanna Township schools.

   b. be assigned to a trained student mentor

3. Produce a video that highlights the diversity of our school district.

   ASSIGNED TO: STHS WHIP TV Staff Advisors and Students
   High School Principals

   STARTING DATE: March, 1998

4. Conduct an orientation for parents that familiarizes them with Goal #7 of Susquehanna Township's Strategic Plan.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Building Principals

   STARTING DATE: September, 1996

5. Develop an assessment of the orientation process at each building to determine the effectiveness of the program.

   a. Use the assessment at the end of each year to evaluate the program

   b. Make recommendations to the building principals that will make the program more effective

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force

STARTING DATE: February, 1997

**OBJECTIVE #6:** Periodically review and update school district policies relative to our diverse population, i.e., "Minority Recruitment," "Religious Activities, Practices, and Observances."

ACTION PLAN:

1. Review district policies every two years.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force

   STARTING DATE: January, 1996

2. Make appropriate recommendations to the School Board for their consideration.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force

   STARTING DATE: January, 1996

**OBJECTIVE #7:** Establish an emergency plan to deal with situations that could potentially be volatile because of the cultural diversity of our school district.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Develop a district plan.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Goal #7 Task Force

   STARTING DATE: September, 1997

2. Develop a communication network among the administration, school board, staff, students, and community in order to disseminate accurate information.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Building Principals

   STARTING DATE: October, 1997

3. Establish a trained emergency team at each building that will:

   a. develop a building plan
   b. identify and train staff
   c. communicate information
   d. facilitate conflict resolution
   e. identify resources
   f. provide a forum for discussion

   ASSIGNED TO: Assistant to the Superintendent
   Building Principals
   Guidance Counselors

   STARTING DATE: April, 1998

4. Periodic review of district and building plans.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
   Building Principals

   STARTING DATE: October, 1999

5. Inform students, staff, and community of the district's emergency plan.

   ASSIGNED TO: Assistant to the Superintendent

Building Principals
Principal's Advisory Committee
STARTING DATE: September, 1998

OBJECTIVE #8: Develop programs that encourage minority students to pursue careers in which they are under-represented.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Periodically review existing programs' (e.g.,Math/ Science Challenge) selection criteria. Update and and revise as needed.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
   Superintendent
   Math/Science Challenge Committee

   STARTING DATE: May, 1996

2. Access information to determine what programs are needed to encourage minorities to pursue careers in which they are under-represented.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   PDE Division of School Equity
   HRC

   STARTING DATE: October, 2000

3. Investigate funding sources.

   ASSIGNED TO: Superintendent
   Assistant to the Superintendent
   Business Manager

   STARTING DATE: March, 2001

4. Gather personnel and informational resources (e.g., PDE Division of School Equity, Human Relations Commission, businesses, colleges, etc.) and investigate existing programs.

   ASSIGNED TO: Goal #7 Task Force
   Assistant to the Superintendent

   STARTING DATE: April, 2001

5. Establish/participate in programs that provide students with workplace experiences (e.g., shadowing; work-study) and link them with positive role models.

   ASSIGNED TO: Assistant to the Superintendent
   Guidance Counselors

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STARTING DATE: September, 1996

## REFERENCES

Tiedt, Pamela and Iris Tiedt. Multicultural Teaching. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995.